

**EXAMINING ADAPTATION STUDIES IN AND THROUGH THE DECADENT AESTHETICS OF**

**J. - K. HUYSMANS' *À REBOURS***

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## Abstract

This thesis sets in dialogue concepts from Decadent and Adaptation Studies within the arena of Huysmans' novel *À rebours* as an extended case study. Examining this text as and containing versions of what might be argued to be adaptation, the research explores border zones of contemporary Adaptation Studies, using this as an alternate approach to examining specific types of intertextuality within this novel as the 'breviary of the Decadence.'

In finding conceptual inherencies between Decadent themes and aspects of adaptation, and considering Huysmans' own preoccupations through the framework of his *oeuvre* and biography, an argument is proposed which reads the adaptations in *À rebours* as detailing Huysmans' experiment with Decadence.

*À rebours* is posited as both being, containing, and allegorising adaptation(s) which are defined by and a part of Decadent aesthetics. Ideas such as artifice, ornamentation, decay, curation, the *mise-en-scène*, the memory palace, entropy, and embodiment all contribute to exploring what adaptation means for the Decadent figures of author and character in *À rebours*.

The adaptations proposed and identified diversify and add to the repository of potential forms of adaptation, as well as providing new conceptual models for particular versions and aspects of adaptation. The work examines adaptation *avant la lettre* in a specific aesthetic and authorial context, and tests current and new methodologies for the study of adaptation, whilst expanding the terminology for how Adaptation Studies theorises adaptation, adaptations, their reception, and their significance for adapters.

## Key Dates for Historical Situating

- 1821. Charles-Pierre Baudelaire born in Paris on 9th April.
- 1845. Baudelaire's first signed work published (Salon of 1845).
- 1848. Charles-Marie-Georges Huysmans born on 5th February.
- 1857. Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du mal* published.
- 1860. Baudelaire's *Paradis artificiels* published.
- 1867. Baudelaire dies.
- 1869. *Le Spleen de Paris* published.
- 1874. Huysmans' *Le Drageoir à épices* published as a selection of prose poems. The following year the book was republished under the title *Le Drageoir aux épices*.
- 1876. Huysmans publishes his first novel, *Marthe, histoire d'une fille*.
- 1879. Publishes his second novel, *Les soeurs Vatard*.
- 1880. 'Sac au dos' published in *Les soirées de Médan*. Publication of *Croquis parisiens*.
- 1883. Publication of *L'art moderne*.
- 1884. Publication of *À rebours*.
- 1887. Publication of *En rade*.
- 1888. Sees the Grünewald Crucifixion at the Cassel museum.
- 1889. Publication of *Certains*.
- 1891. Publication of *Là-bas*.
- 1895. Publication of *En route*. Death of Huysmans' mistress Anna Meunier.
- 1896. Publication of *La cathédrale*.
- 1901. Huysmans undergoes ceremony of oblatehood at Ligugè. Publication of *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam*.
- 1907. Death of Huysmans.
- 1908. Posthumous publication of *Trois églises et trois primitifs*.

## 1. Introduction

This thesis places select concepts from Adaptation Studies and Decadent Studies in dialogue with each other in order to explore the ways in which versions of adaptation can be seen to be significant within the themes and form of a particular Decadent novel. The work primarily reads ideas of adaptation in the Decadence of its case study. By investigating conceptual resonances between ideas of adaptation and Decadence generated by a reading of J.-K. Huysmans' 1884 novel *À rebours*, new perspectives on concepts and versions of adaptation are explored, which point in the direction of further study, whilst the novel is shown to contain a portmanteau of what might be termed adaptations. These are argued for as key creative embodiments of the novel's Decadent themes, whether as formal intertextual attributes, or dramatised narrative tropes, suggesting that in *À rebours*, liminal versions of adaptation practice become an important part of Huysmans' fictional experimentation with the ontology of Decadent aesthetics. This reads *À rebours* within the writer's *oeuvre*, and Decadence within its *fin de siècle* context, in order to think about these personal significations for the adapter, and for the Decadent aesthetic philosophy.

Throughout, the adaptations and concepts from Adaptation Studies that are explored might be thought of as border zones testing assumptions within the field. In examining these through their presence in the case study, the research demonstrates that these border zones of adaptive theory and practice may be productive for expanding the ways in which we think about adaptation. The thesis also aims to show that, since the conventional medium specific methodologies of literature/film adaptation have been expanded, applying theories of adaptation as an intertextual methodology can be a fruitful addition to literary approaches.<sup>1</sup> Adaptation Studies offers different perspectives when applied to literary texts, and in its 'petit

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<sup>1</sup> As well as adding evidence to the claim by Griffiths that "literary adaptation, whatever its form, is a defining feature of nineteenth-century French literary production" (2013: 3).

theory' approach to theorisation (Leitch, 2017: 703),<sup>2</sup> may bring a useful flexibility and diversity to the analysis of literary adaptations, as well as a relocation of an examination of intentionality and the creative process. Similarly, the method of using tropes from the text as a dictionary of new figurative framings for conceptualising aspects of adaptation is proved to be efficacious in broadening the repositories of Adaptation Studies. Seeking new modes of thinking about the theory and practice of adaptation, this approach also contributes to a revision of a version of the field's case study methodology.

This extended introduction sets out some of the dominant arguments, aims, and motivations for the research. It also outlines the ways in which the thesis' key term of 'adaptation' is defined and approached within the investigations, whilst suggesting some of the 'border zones' of Adaptation Studies that become sites for exploration in the example of *À rebours*.

### Adaptation Studies and Decadent Literature

The motivations for this project began in a reading of the arguments against realism found in the critical works of Baudelaire and Wilde. As allegories for a rejection of fidelity as a practical aim, the discussions presented interesting possibilities in the investigation of artifice as an artistic goal. If mapped onto intertextual engagement rather than the sources of nature and the city, this might present Decadent and Aestheticist theory and practice as demanding radical infidelities, suggesting a figurative model for a particular kind of adaptation, whilst elucidating the approach to the source found in these works.

Following on from the idea that the aesthetic theories outlined in Baudelaire's work might include threads that could be read as analogies for approaches to adaptation, a line of influence was traced in order to select a work which put these ideas into practice, and

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<sup>2</sup> See a fuller exploration of this later in the chapter.

therefore to embody a Baudelairean approach to adaptation. Decadent literature was here the obvious choice, as critics agree that Baudelairean aesthetic and philosophical ideals provided the framework for many writers considered Decadent, including Huysmans (Potolsky, Denisoff, Constable, 1999: 25; Coquio, 1993: 95; Baldick, 1955: 136).<sup>3</sup>

These initial impulses remain in the thesis, where an exploration of Decadent aesthetic approaches<sup>4</sup> (entangled with thematic preoccupations) are shown to engender unusual adaptive practices, and, in their most concentrated forms, a preoccupation with ideas and versions of adaptation that signify the practice as important for certain types of Decadent creativity. The methods of utilising figurative language to extract conceptualisations of aspects of adaptation and its theories from the analyses of the source text (a critical adaptation to some degree) also remain central. They are a way to generate new perspectives, and to identify the ways in which the investigations of Decadent forms of adaptation might be abstracted to more general use. The engagement with concepts of Decadence is, like Adaptation Studies, necessarily selective, due to the fact that two fields are being addressed.

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<sup>3</sup> Decadence itself is often posited as beginning with Baudelaire, who Riffaterre calls “the last Romantic and first Decadent” (1999: 70), while Barbey d’Aurevilly, whose pistol/cross ultimatum was posed as response to both *Les Fleurs du Mal* and *À rebours*, described Baudelaire’s talent as “the flower of evil blooming in the hothouse of Decadence” (Brooks, 1998: 32). Decadence as a literary term also emerges from critical reactions to Baudelaire, first used by Gautier in the 1868 Preface to describe the “theory of art” found in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Cevasco, 2001: 17). Bourget’s famous figurative exploration, which uses the term to tie together literary style and cultural ideas of degeneration and entropy, was also conceived in an 1885 essay on Baudelaire, and the writers of the *fin de siècle* took up the poet consciously as Decadent forefather. A phenomenon of ‘Baudelairisme’ thereby emerged in the 1880s and 1890s, where writers sought to venerate, imitate, or adapt a Baudelairean style or atmosphere in their work, using *Les Fleurs du Mal* as “a source-model” (Constable, Potolsky, Denisoff, 1999: 25). In this, the poet was constructed retrospectively through a “pathological intensification” of his tropes (Coquio, 1993: 95), becoming a composite with his work, a version or heterocosmic text which might be adapted. Many practitioners labelled Decadent might be seen to have undertaken this adaptation which forms literary antecedence. Catulle Mendes reads like recycled scraps from Baudelaire’s table for Spackman (1998: 816), while Moreau is described as deriving his “theoretical principles” of the “Beauty of Inertia” and the “Necessity of Richness” from the aesthetics of *Les Fleurs du Mal* and the Salons (Praz, 1933: 303-304).

<sup>4</sup> Whilst the Decadent grouping is a collectivisation that has proved slippery for rigorous delineation and definition (Hustvedt, 1998: 12; Barstad & Knutsen, 2016: xii; Weir, 1995: xix; Gilman; 1979), it is generally taken to have gradually blossomed from the middle of the nineteenth century onward (Buvik, 2001: 25). The *fin de siècle* saw a period of intensification and more definite critical grouping throughout the 1880s and 1890s (Stableford, 1998: 31), as literary experimentation was allied to the social obsessions with decay and degeneration (Murray & Hall, 2013: 1-5; Marshall, 2007: 5-6).



Decadence is renowned for its intensity in terms of sensory experience, both for characters and also readers when it is communicated through the excesses of style. Reed (1985: 11) sees Decadent style as always associated with an “autumnal” mood of pessimism,<sup>5</sup> while others have traced the unwholesome atmosphere of Decadent texts with their obsessive sensuality (Cevasco, 2001: 34). The conference and subsequent collected volume *Decadence and the Senses* (2017) explores the extremities of the Decadent sensorium in depth, with Jessica Gossling’s work being particularly relevant in discussing the metaphor of the hothouse in *À rebours* as a way to consider the staging of *correspondences* between body and mind. The Decadent sensorium as an authored experience of overwhelming intensity, based in the hybridity of synaesthesia, is here discussed as a product of creative endeavours which can frequently be analysed in terms of adaptation.

Critics have agreed that in Decadent works, the surface of the texts is repeatedly foregrounded (Denisoff, 2007: 37; Bernheimer, 1989: 264, Schor, 2013: 47) in an acknowledged intertextuality which is important as a foundation for identifying adaptation.<sup>6</sup> From an initial notion that Decadent attitudes towards nature and source material might influence approaches to adaptive practice, the adaptations and related concepts found within Decadent aesthetic practice and theory were focused on as potentially radical approaches to adaptation, or at the very least, versions of adaptation which might trouble many assumptions and definitions common to Adaptation Studies.

This is based not only in the themes of artifice and decay which suggested an inherent impulse towards authorial alteration of source materials, but also the nineteenth century’s

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<sup>5</sup> Lyytikäinen describes the way that the Decadent sensibility “dramatises despair and the death-drive in hallucinatory visions against a background of the still aching wound of lost faith or lost security” (2016: 28).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, *À rebours* has been described as a novel primarily concerned with displaying the literary origins of its character (Bernheimer, 1998: 368). Huysmans also shows Des Esseintes trying “to puzzle out the antecedents” of other creators, such as Moreau, whilst connecting this artist to the character’s project and that of the novel, by describing the way that this “mystical pagan, this illuminee,” managed to “shut out the modern world so completely as to behold, in the heart of present-day Paris, the awful visions and magical apotheoses of other ages” (Huysmans, 1956: 56).

preoccupation with reworking the artistic past (Sanders, 2005: 3), an aspect heightened in Decadent works obsessed with recreating and rehabilitating historical forms (Murray and Hall, 2013: 8).<sup>7</sup> A similarly relevant aspect suggesting the aptness of Decadent works for adaptive study was the way that Decadent literary strategies have been described as offering a “powerful challenge” to entrenched modes of textuality and reading (Potolsky, Denisoff, Constable, 1999: 25). This rebelliousness is added to an obsession with the textual vestiges of the past, with re-contextualisations, collections (Potolsky, 2013: 72), and the materiality of texts (Murray and Hall, 2013: 13). In addition, the aesthetic ideals inherited from Baudelaire regarding increased artifice as signifying authorial intervention (and the concomitant distrust of ‘natural’ unmediated sources), means that Decadence suggests identifiably unusual approaches to adaptation, and that these occupy a significant place within its aesthetic approaches.

Similarly, Decadent themes of decay recommend themselves as potential metaphorical models for expanding the thinking around certain concepts or types of adaptation. This is particularly in their gesture towards ideas of a textual afterlife,<sup>8</sup> and the role adaptation might play in such a framing. These applications of thematic tropes to adaptation concepts are engaged in relation to the specificities of the case study’s adaptations, but also indicate their applicability to further examples. Productive associations also exist between Decadent literature and postmodern ideas of simulation, linked particularly to the creation of authored spaces that re-stage the outside world, and these ideas allow an exploration of adaptation’s staging of slippages between representation and re-presentation.

Formally, the hybridity and foregrounded intermediality of Decadent works (noted by de Vries, 2011: 235) recommends transmedial or interdisciplinary approaches in addition to

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<sup>7</sup> Ivory says that Decadent texts are “replete with reimagined eras and objects” (2016: 106). Barstad and Knutsen also argue that Decadence was a “reaction to a collision between the old and the new” (2016: x), the experience of the emerging ambivalence of modernity which is filtered through the specifics of Huysmans in this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> Recalling Leitch’s ecology of texts (2017: 700).

literary methodologies, a point agreed by many critics.<sup>9</sup> These scholars often identify a transmedial Decadent poetics, yet there is no adaptation perspective to examine how this transmediality may often be created through textual transfer, or where it is specifically authored within a work. Adaptation Studies has not turned its attention to Decadent literature in any concerted sense,<sup>10</sup> and so this gap between the extensive work on the early days of film adaptation beginning around the time of Huysmans' death,<sup>11</sup> and the work done by Elliott in mapping the influence on Adaptation Studies of Victorian attitudes to intermedial debates and interart categories (2003), is potentially a useful addition to investigations of adaptation *avant la lettre*.

Intermedial and intertextual assessments of *À rebours* appear as shorter works<sup>12</sup> or within broader assessments (e.g. Ziegler, 2004), while more extended forms can be seen with regards to figures aesthetically related to Huysmans, such as Baudelaire (Evans, 1993; Grotta, 2015) and Wilde (de Vries, 2011). A full study of adaptation in the work of Zola (Griffiths, 2009) represents an important precedent, though its adaptive methodology is for the most part fairly straightforward in comparing case studies back and forth between Zola novels and their cinematic or theatrical adaptations, similar to Gural and Singer's earlier work (2005). However, this work does break important ground in its analysis of the way in which Zola's texts actually think through concepts of adaptation within their narratives, themes, and form. This is a reading of process allegorised in content that is a central part of this thesis' approach.

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<sup>9</sup> e.g. Reed (1985); Barstad & Knutsen (2016: xiv); St. John (1999: ix); Potolsky, Denisoff, Constable (1999: 25).

<sup>10</sup> There are crossovers in Elliott's work, plus the article and book on adaptation and Emile Zola, who was not a Decadent writer but has strong associations with Huysmans, by Singer and Griffiths respectively (see above). D'Annunzio (via Visconti in Hennessey (2011)) and d'Aureville (Brevik-Zender, 2012) as Decadent figures have been examined, as well as some adaptations of Decadent works and tropes in Romanian cinema (Pethő, 2011). Lucia Kramer wrote her PhD thesis on adaptations of Oscar Wilde's work, which in the case of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) has since been examined again in terms of its cinematic adaptations (e.g. Wells-Lassagne, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> e.g. Gunning (2004); Buchanan (2012); Robinson (2012).

<sup>12</sup> e.g. Mitchievici (2011); Mills (2010); Riffaterre (1999); or the interesting perspective of Praz as reader and translator of Baudelaire, which contains ideas closely linked to adaptation (Schellino, 2015).

Griffiths followed up her work on Zola with a 2013 book (co-edited with Andrew Watts) exploring the attraction of nineteenth-century French writers for adapters. This provides a useful context in its explorations of the irresistibility of the nineteenth century to adapters in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The expected focus on Zola is expanded to include Flaubert, Balzac, Hugo, Maupassant, and Verne –Huysmans and the specificities of Decadence are therefore a complementary addition to its scholarship. What the text examines most importantly for the current study is the way that the nineteenth century itself was an era of “seemingly endless exchanges,” where literary adaptation was a “defining feature of nineteenth-century French literary production” (Griffiths, 2013: 1). This is clearly an important precursor for examinations of literary adaptation by Huysmans in Decadent Paris.

The framework utilised in this text tends to remain with the source novel-to-intermedial adaptation approach which occupies the most well-trodden of methodologies in Adaptation Studies. However, there is an investigation of the literary author as adapter and adapted which is a key contribution supporting the work undertaken in this research. The intertextuality of nineteenth-century authors is examined through, and in dialogue with, Adaptation Studies, and authors are shown to be forming literary identities through their adaptation. They are chosen “for the resonance of their authorial approach with contemporary debates on adaptation” (2013: 7) - certainly an initial motivation for the choice of Huysmans in this research. The themes of temporality and textual memory in Flaubert’s work, Zola’s *ekphrastic* methods, and a hauntology of Adaptation Studies all find their echo in the analyses of Decadent adaptation in *À rebours*, but it is the central idea that adaptation was a “dominant art form” in nineteenth-century France which is most important for setting up the current study (Griffiths, 2013: 10-11).

Another contribution which demonstrates the increasing awareness of adaptation in the *fin de siècle*, and one which locates this specifically within Decadent literature, comes through the chapter by Ivory in *States of Decadence* (2016). This examines the operatic adaptation of

Wilde's play *A Florentine Tragedy* by Alexander Zemlinsky as a combination of Decadent and Modernist approaches, deconstructing the notion of a great caesura between these movements.

Ivory describes the way that Decadent texts expose "the lie that is at the heart of conventional representation," creating a distantiation which prompts serious reflection. For Ivory, this is done through a dialectic of familiarity and estrangement evoked by a strategy of "reimagining eras, events, and objects" in a way that rejects dominant principles of "verisimilitude, realism, scientific objectivity, and historical accuracy." Clearly relevant to these ideas, and directly included by Ivory, are processes of "ornamentation and adaptation" which open up the Decadent text to its own subsequent re-appropriation (an idea explored in Chapter Six) (2016: 107-8).

This challenge to representation through adaptation is in this research filtered through the specifics of Huysmans' authorship, where Naturalism and the embodied materiality of bourgeois Capitalist life<sup>13</sup> (paradoxically represented by 'Nature,' a term later explored in greater depth) are challenged through curatorial adaptation in order to negotiate the subject's position within this. Ivory says that Decadent material within a Modernist artwork "invites its own adaptation, and encourages that adaptation to break with tradition, estrange the reader/audience, and unsettle the norms of form and content" (2016: 108). These ideas are an important supporting confluence for many of the ways that adaptation is shown to function in *À rebours*.

From those initial motivations in Baudelaire, which shifted to a broad examination of Decadent works and their adaptive practice, the research project culminating in this thesis

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<sup>13</sup> Railed against extensively by Des Esseintes at the novel's end: "more cunning and contemptible than the impoverished aristocracy and the discredited clergy, the bourgeoisie borrowed their frivolous love of show and their old-world arrogance, which it cheapened through its own lack of taste, and stole their natural defects, which it turned into hypocritical vices. Overbearing and underhand in behaviour, base and cowardly in character, it ruthlessly shot down its perennial and essential dupe, the mob, which it had previously unmuzzled and sent flying at the throats of the old castes" (Huysmans, 1956: 203).

swiftly became focused around Huysmans' novel *À rebours*. Condensing the project in order to examine one Decadent novel as a case study was in this case justified by the text's representative relationship to broader Decadent themes and aesthetics. It also meant that conclusions could be drawn around the specific significance of adaptation for the relationship between author and Decadent concepts in a way which would not have been possible with a broader survey. This allows Hutcheon's call for a re-integration of intentionality to be acted upon,<sup>14</sup> examining a specific adapter within both personal and historical contexts.

The representative nature of *À rebours* for Decadent literature has been well established, with the frequently repeated appellation of Decadent "breviary" first attributed to the work by Huysmans' English contemporary Arthur Symons. Symons saw the novel as synecdoche for "a spiritual epoch" (1899: 255), and other writers and scholars have echoed this sentiment. Holbrook Jackson called *À rebours* "the apotheosis of the *fin de siècle* spirit" (1922: 28), whilst Mario Praz described it as a catalogue of the Decadent psychology, and the "pivot" upon which Decadence turns (1933: 322). For Praz, the idea of Decadence was also, between 1880 and 1900 "the turning-point around which the literary world revolved" (1933: 396), and so the novel can be seen as a crystallisation or quintessence of certain aesthetic ideals important to this period in a way unmatched by any other text.<sup>15</sup>

Any assessment of Decadent literature must address *À rebours* to some degree, and in an exploration of the way in which Decadent aesthetic ideals and thematic concerns might be seen to shape approaches to adaptation, as well as the significance adaptations might be posited to have within these frameworks, the logical decision was to explore this novel as an extended case study. In this approach, these aims and ideas could be unfolded at length and with an eye to interrelation, as well as within a framework which allowed for conclusions to

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<sup>14</sup> See pages 56-64.

<sup>15</sup> As noted by Starkie (1958: 85) and Ellis (1931).

be reached regarding the reasons for adaptation, utilising biography and the intertextuality of *oeuvre*.

The *fin de siècle* as “an age conscious of itself as an era of new beginnings” yet defined in relation to mid-century roots (Marshall, 2007: 5) can also be posited as an important time for thinking about ideas related to adaptation.<sup>16</sup> As noted, Griffiths’ work sets up a foundation for considering adaptation in the nineteenth century as “key to the artistic life of this era,” which is “characterized” by the ways in which texts “nourish each other adaptively” (Griffiths, 2013: 1). Elliott (2003) and Jellenik (2017) contend that the nineteenth century gave birth to many of the enduring fallacies that underpin the theorisation of adaptation, whilst Gunning’s 2004 work suggests that early cinema was a period of rampant and inventive intertextual practice, which became the cinematic trends that birthed Adaptation Studies. An avant-garde media movement of the period in-between, with strong links between theory and practice, interests in the re-use of past forms,<sup>17</sup> and self-conscious approaches to text and media usage, would therefore seem to be an important one for examination. This may come through adaptive practice and adaptive conceptual subtexts; both as an influence on subsequent approaches, and as a window onto changes.

Huysmans, as selected Decadent author via this case study novel, is also conducive to considering through ideas of adaptation. His definition as a ‘nostalgic modernist’ by Donato<sup>18</sup> exemplifies many of the temporal conflicts that impinge on ideas of re-use and experimentalism, collections and nascent ideas of aura (Donato, 2004: 119), and these are all

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<sup>16</sup> Ledger and Luckhurst describe it as a “crucial moment in the formation and transformation of [the] object[s] of study” of many disciplines, whose legacy is still being worked through (2000: xiv).

<sup>17</sup> Potolsky identifies an imitation at the heart of Decadent aesthetics which was not the “final recourse of exhausted intellects,” but “a method of critical resignification” (1999: 22), a reframing which suggests that processes of adaptation are worth investigating as vectors of this technique. Griffiths has discussed adaptations themselves as imitations (1997).

<sup>18</sup> Reflected in certain tendencies summarising the era, which is defined for Marshall by the energy which emerges from facing the possibility of ending: “in confronting the end of the century, and arguably the ending of the narratives which had been engendered in the mid-nineteenth-century period, a creative energy is unleashed which, in its vitality and multiplicity, becomes the most effective statement against our understanding of this period as the end of anything” (2007: 2).

important for considering adaptation as a temporally-defined textual strategy.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the preoccupation with *ekphrasis* and intermediality in works such as *Cauchemar* (1883) and *Trois primitifs* (1905), the self-conscious intertextuality of *À rebours*' obsessive lists of works, and the 'adaptation' of historical sources reflexively dramatised in *Là-bas* (1891)<sup>20</sup> and symbolically collaged in *St. Lydwine de Schiedam* (1901),<sup>21</sup> make this author a particularly interesting adapter to study. These textual engagements suggest Huysmans as a dynamic practitioner of the *fin de siècle*, and it is here posited that these formal techniques were particularly significant in the Decadent period of his *oeuvre*<sup>22</sup> for contributing to a sense of personal adaptation (in its non-textual sense), where form is an ontological dialogue with time and place.

This sketch, which has outlined the way that this project moved from initial ideas, to broad summary, then into the specifics of a single text and its relationship to broader Decadence in the *fin de siècle*, including some of the motivations and justifications for these choices, is unpacked further across this chapter.

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<sup>19</sup> Barstad and Knutsen see this tension as present in Decadence as a larger grouping, where one of its key paradoxes is the overlapping of the radical and the reactionary (2016: xi).

<sup>20</sup> See Donato (2004: 4 & 119).

<sup>21</sup> Explored by Sieburth (1998).

<sup>22</sup> There is much debate about the tripartite division of Huysmans' canon, with oversimplifications of the divisions (Naturalist, Decadent, Catholic) common, according to Antosh (1986: 7). She traces a spirituality through all three sections, problematising the easy split, whilst Cogny (1953) sees Naturalist elements throughout. However, Baldick (1955) views the Naturalist thread as negligible, as well as Zola's influence, where only *Les sœurs Vatar* (1879) is truly Naturalist for Huysmans' key biographer. Ziegler takes up a similar position in questioning whether Huysmans was ever a Naturalist writer, where even in *Marthe*, his first novel, there is a questioning and undermining of mimetic realism, coupled with a striving for painterly effects and *ekphrases*, which seems to contribute to Baldick's frequently 'disliked' compartmentalisation of the stages of Huysmans' literary career (Ziegler, 2004: 39). Huysmans himself, of course, reads many of his novels after his conversion in the manner of *À rebours*' 'Preface, Written Twenty Years After the Novel,' where the text is considered as proto-Catholic, a documentation of an incremental conversion. This thesis stays predominantly with the 'classical' division of Baldick, though a more open approach seems advisable, where the spiritual aspect, present yet largely suppressed in the early novels, builds throughout the *oeuvre*, whilst the Naturalist element might be seen to be present in the early novels, repressed into only an aspect of style in the middle period, only to emerge again in spiritual naturalism (beginning in *Là-bas*). This approach remains flexible enough to allow for coexistence and overlapping, whilst maintaining broad categorisations which are important for tracing possible influences of intentionality. Bernheimer also contributes to this direction, positing a collapse of divisions through an obsessive repetition of themes across all of Huysmans' novels, suggesting "that a broadened interpretation of the meaning of Decadence can justly be applied to the majority of his works" (1998: 369).



## Methodology: The Case Study

The justification of the selection of Decadence, Huysmans, and *À rebours* for exploration through ideas of adaptation requires a further refinement on a structural level. Adaptation Studies might be seen to have moved away from a case study model, due to a particular methodology of one-to-one comparison being seen to have hampered progression by encouraging a lack of communication, citation, and broader theorisation, in favour of new examples. This was the “endless series of 20-page articles” criticised by Ray in 2000, where a preponderance of dual case studies in a New Critical/Aesthetic Formalist mode was seen to have fragmented the field. Elliott actually sees postmodern cultural theories as encouraging a similar tendency in contemporary approaches, potentially threatening to bring about a second wave of atomisation (Elliott, 2017: 687-8).

This research utilises a single case study, whilst agreeing with much of the criticism of the dominance (not the method itself, which has its place in Adaptation Studies) of the source-adaptation case study model through the 1970s-1990s period.<sup>23</sup> Of course, the version here is far more sustained due to the scope available, which allows for a rethinking of approaches. What is presented here through its implementation is an argument for refashioning the case study. This follows Leitch, Hutcheon, and others in Adaptation Studies 2.0,<sup>24</sup> who took a collection of case studies as the model for their monographs, exploding the binaries of source/adaptation.<sup>25</sup> This allowed for broader theorisations, moving away from equivalence

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<sup>23</sup> An instance of the repetition without variation that has been a central issue for Adaptation Studies (Elliott, 2014: 24). Ray has similarly identified a historical lack of cumulative knowledge in the field that allowed the repetitions of theory to occur (2000), particularly in the 1970s, where, isolated at the periphery of Film Studies (Corrigan, 2007: 40), and stuck in the rut of tracing differences between novel and film, “each article seemed isolated from all the others” (Ray, 2000: 126).

<sup>24</sup> A term coined by Leitch (2017: 3).

<sup>25</sup> e.g. Leitch (2007); Hutcheon (2006); Geraghty (2008).

and proximity towards more network-based intertextual methodologies. The model used here breaks from the dual case study model, yet moves in a different direction to these scholars.

At first glance, the decision to move away from this approach, which might have been possible in a study that included multiple works of Decadent literature, could seem regressive; a plunge back in to the comparative methodology of tracing similarity and difference between a source and an adaptation. However, this thesis attempts a different approach to the case study by utilising a single text - something rare in Adaptation Studies, and more indebted to a work such as Barthes' *S/Z* (1970) - to pursue an in-depth examination of the role of adaptation within the intertextual and symbolic networks of that text. This rejects the comparative case study in favour of an approach more identified with literary studies - a logical methodological inclusion in Adaptation Studies' arsenal, if the intertextual framing of the 'second wave' of adaptation scholars is to be followed.

Whilst Cartmell and Whelehan see Stam and Elliott's remaining focus on literature as "a limited and rarefied segment of the field" (2007: 4), and Murray rails against the "tamely familiar methodological guise" that persists even into the new wave of critical work (Murray, 2012: 4), this thesis' approach to literary adaptation examines the text not for the ways in which it is adapted, but the ways in which it adapts. Relocating literature as the adapter rather than the adapted (or as well as the adapted) seeks to remould the "deplorably" (Leitch, 2012: 99) archaeological tendency of some adaptation scholarship in its focus on the source text, as well as revising the approach to literary case studies in Adaptation Studies.<sup>26</sup>

A single rather than a dual case study follows Stam (2005), Geraghty (2008), and others in removing the predominance of the source text and the resultant belatedness of the adaptation. Instead, the text's intertextual and intermedial networks are examined for the places where it can be argued that adaptation is taking place. This tests the ill-defined

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<sup>26</sup> Strong's forthcoming work 'Pride and Prejudice and Permutations' also focuses on literary adaptations of literary sources.

boundaries between adaptation and other modes of intertextuality, making the 'adaptation' itself a liminal zone through its lack of conformity to conventional definitions. Instead, the text becomes a dig site for the unearthing of potential versions of adaptation, which prompt conceptualisations and questions.

The single case study model of examining *À rebours* for the ways in which it can be read as containing and allegorising modes of adaptation sits between the approaches of literary intertextuality and Adaptation Studies, an application of Adaptation Studies as a methodology for intertextual study. The single case study also limits the scope of the research productively, as it shifts from a historiographical approach to Decadence to the mining of a single example for adaptive possibilities. Conclusions about the use of adaptation in the work can therefore address specificities in terms of author and context. Instead of looking at cinematic or other media adaptations of Decadent texts, a Decadent text is examined for the versions, echoes, allegories, or fragments of adaptation it contains, and the significance of these within the text and for the author.

The text here becomes a staging ground, an arena for foregrounding the critical and creative dialogues between concepts drawn from Decadence and Adaptation Studies, dialogues which include the use of images and terms drawn from the novel as figurative models for thinking about concepts related to adaptation. The single primary text offers a way to examine both microscopic and macroscopic issues in adaptation that remain largely neglected in the field, where other kinds of reading would not engender the kinds of insights produced by finding resonances between fragments or reading adaptive approaches through their narrative allegories. Elliott has called for such microscopic studies to be undertaken (2013: 33),<sup>27</sup> and here they allow interplay between multiple levels of adaptation within an

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<sup>27</sup> Where they may free adaptation scholars from fidelity to traditional theories of media, genres, and forms, as well as from the vagueness of intertextuality and intermediality (Elliott, 2013: 34).

intertextual framework, rather than being defined by intertextual reception, yet isolated from other forms of intertextuality.

This approach to a single case study as both dialogic arena and allegorical springboard works in tandem with the multiple and occasionally fragmentary definitions employed for identifying adaptation and adaptations. As a version of what Huysmans is argued to be doing in *À rebours*, the case study is here used to collect fragments from Adaptation Studies and the novel's Decadent aesthetics, with the analysis operating between the two in order to find an adaptive reading of the novel's Decadence, and a Decadent version of adaptation that contributes new readings of concepts to Adaptation Studies. The case study model is not therefore operating at the level of traditional methodologies, where it is used as proof of a theory, or read through close textual analysis as a mode of literary interpretation. Instead, here the case study model is revised and situated between Adaptation Studies and Decadent literary studies, creating an interrelation of fragments that forms an argument around adaptation in this version of Decadent aesthetics, as well as providing Decadent readings of concepts of adaptation. The idea of fragmentation is inspired by the centrality of this concept to Decadence,<sup>28</sup> and by Leitch's idea of petit-theories (unpacked subsequently), whilst the situating of the case study model between the two fields wishes to find a methodological approach that avoids the prescriptions of literary approaches, as well as bringing Adaptation Studies 2.0 closer to the intertextuality it relies upon.

### Methodology: Adaptation Studies

In terms of both Adaptation Studies and Decadent literature, this situating chapter is neither an exhaustive historical survey, nor a cataloguing of the current state of the union. Summaries of the field have been accused of omitting strong works, highlighting weak

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<sup>28</sup> See pages 50-51.

scholarship, and inventing myths, which have contributed to limiting and distorting the field of Adaptation Studies (Elliott, 2017: 691). In the fragmentary approach used here a range of concepts - which are sometimes marginal - are employed from both fields.

Concepts derived from Adaptation Studies are flagged up so that tentative definitions, methodological framings, and critical reasoning might lay the foundations for the explorations that follow. This foundation will be constituted primarily of an interaction with Adaptation Studies 2.0, a major shift that shaped much of the contemporary work on adaptation, in addition to some of the most recent contributions to the theorisation of adaptation. The debt to the 'second wave' of Adaptation Studies is particularly noticeable in the partial appropriation (or adaptation) of Hutcheon's chapter structure from her 2006 work for subsequent sub-headings.

Leitch says that studies of adaptation often fall into one of three categories. They either assess the past, compile the present, or make a case for how the future might, or should, develop (2017: 1). This research takes up a hybrid approach in that it mines a particular past for versions of current concepts of adaptation, which may raise questions regarding how future studies can progress. *À rebours* is analysed for the ways in which its adaptations might echo contemporary practice; for the ways in which its adaptations suggest new models for conceptualising how certain types or processes of adaptation function; and for the ways in which adaptation can be significant and symbolic for adapters with regard to their personal and professional evolution within historical contexts. Adaptation is here analysed for the unobserved places it has been, which in turn highlight the unobserved places in which it currently exists, or its current neglected features, to then provide ideas for how these aspects might be conceptualised. This approach looks back in order to broaden the scope of the present, and to open new roads for the future.

Surveying the past of Adaptation Studies is therefore not a goal for this chapter, as it is a particular moment of the past of the practice - rather than its theorisation - that is focused

on. This is similarly not a distillation of contemporary theorisations catalogued through a case study, or a theorisation methodology which suggests where Adaptation Studies should go next in terms of an overarching paradigm. Instead, this research operates on the margins of these approaches, using concepts of adaptation to think about Huysmans' relationship to Decadent aesthetics in the novel *À rebours*, and using concepts from this analysis, and from Decadent studies, to re-think aspects of adaptation, adaptations, and their theorisation within their Decadent context. This attempts to utilise a broad range of ideas to find versions of adaptation that diversify the current conception (certainly not unanimous or even unified) of what Adaptation Studies' remit is.

### Adaptation and Theorisation

In order to further explore the methodology for examining adaptation in this thesis, the relationship between theorisation and Adaptation Studies requires discussion. This has recently been the focus of rigorous examination on the part of both Elliott and Leitch. Whilst both have long been focused on the problems limiting the field,<sup>29</sup> their contributions to the 2017 *Handbook* crystallise the issues of theorisation in Adaptation Studies and provide a framework for thinking about current research.

Elliott suggests that Adaptation Studies has long fostered unhealthy attitudes towards theorisation, and that these have seriously hampered scholarship. Some of the theoretical missteps are due to the positioning of both adaptations and their study as simultaneously outside of disciplines and at the same time claimed by all, where scholars vie for theoretical control whilst castigating Adaptation Studies for poor scholarship. Elliott sees adaptation scholars as internalising these accusations and turning on each other, where the field blames

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<sup>29</sup> e.g. Leitch (2007, 2012); Elliott (2003, 2014).

itself for its marginalisation. It is these theoretical ‘wars’<sup>30</sup> that Elliott has taken as her focus, moving on from the interart disciplinary wars,<sup>31</sup> which were originally argued for as the key factor in producing fallacies of conceptualisation and theorisation within Adaptation Studies (Elliott, 2003). Adapting adaptations to fit theories, and wielding these against competing theoretical perspectives,<sup>32</sup> has been identified by Elliott as one of the prime culprits in the failure of progression in the theorisation of adaptations in themselves (Elliott, 2017: 683; 2013: 4, 22).

The inherently rebellious nature of adaptations when it comes to rupturing theoretical boundaries (Leitch, 2007: 1) is perhaps one reason for the troubled relationship between theorisation and adaptation. Adaptation Studies might be blamed for the bad behaviour of its subjects with regard to theoretical taxonomies. However, there are certainly problems within the critical discourse too. Elliott claims that no field is more “contemptuous” of fellow scholars (2017: 681), or more guilty of a failure to cite (2017: 690) or even read (2017: 689) older/newer works due to misguided notions of theoretical progressivism or nostalgia (2017: 685). Many works of adaptation scholarship claim originality by criticising previously progressive approaches as bad theory, and Elliott identifies a pervasive notion that the field is merely waiting for the right theories to save it (2017: 680). Much of the good work done in Adaptation Studies has been in spite of these limitations. Both Elliott and Leitch see that through increased reflexivity, scholars of adaptation might increase the collective ability to move past the lapses that have undermined progress in what remains a dynamic and exciting field. They agree that it is not new theories or the right theories that Adaptation Studies

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<sup>30</sup> Adaptation Studies’ microcosmic version of the broader ‘theory wars’ noted by Whelehan as characterising the 1980s, and whose influence is still felt.

<sup>31</sup> These were the primary focus of Elliott’s 2003 work *Rethinking the Novel/Film Debate*, which explored conceptual weaknesses in the study of adaptations through interart debates of the nineteenth century, positing a lineage that has restricted Adaptation Studies.

<sup>32</sup> As additionally noted by Cardwell (2002: 69).

needs, but a rethinking of the very relationship between adaptation and theorisation (2017: 681/698).

In proposing solutions for these problems, or strategies for the renegotiation of the relationship, Leitch wishes for less of a focus on theory in itself. He agrees with scholars such as Bordwell and Carroll who suggest that the fields of literature and film studies would “fare better if they weren’t kept so firmly under the sway of one reigning theoretical paradigm at a time” (2017: 698). Instead, the suggestion adopted by Leitch from these scholars is that multiple theories on an equal footing in the field might bring about a shift from psychoanalytic paradigms towards constructivist theories that dwell on consciously created contexts, intentionality, and hermeneutics - a theoretical triad that finds a degree of support in the investigations of this research.<sup>33</sup> Leitch, seeking a profusion of theories to replace the orthodoxy of Grand Theory, is, like Elliott, focused less on the types of theories that might be utilised, and more on a need for reorientation when it comes to thinking about theory in the humanities, and particularly in Adaptation Studies (Leitch, 2017: 699).

It has been a criticism of adaptation scholarship that even works which promise theoretical consensus in their titles do not manage to arrive at a Grand Theory which conceptualises adaptation adequately; as in Peeters’ criticism of Hutcheon’s work (2007). However, as Cartmell and Whelehan show in their response to the same work - that it points to the impossibility of a unified theory of adaptation (2010: 56) - scholars of adaptation recognise the degrees of omission and forced manipulation required to get adaptations to stay in any one theoretical box, even as many have been slow to act on this in devising new strategies for theorisation in adaptation.

Theoretical hybridities and departures from conventional methodologies - strategies for renegotiating the relationship between theorisation and adaptation - indicate that scholars

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<sup>33</sup> However, this is tempered by combining approaches sensitive to authorship with the reader-reception theory that has been influential for Adaptation Studies.



of adaptation are beginning to open up to Elliott's previously stated need for theoretical approaches to adapt to the adaptations under examination, not vice versa (2014: 20). Instead of Grand Theories that may redeem adaptation, the field instead requires an iconoclastic approach allowing for fragmentation and mobilisation, a theoretical practice of adaptive collaging, rather than the dominating application of single theories. What Adaptation Studies requires is for theorisation to incorporate some adaptation, just as adaptation has its elements of theorisation.<sup>34</sup>

Leitch agrees with Elliott's early recommendation for the furtherance of "hybrid methodologies that integrate formal and cultural and textual and contextual factors" (Elliott, 2003: 584-5). He suggests that these are already instinctive approaches for adaptation scholars, whose methods cannot be easily divided into - for example - textual and contextual study, or theory and practice (Leitch, 2017: 701). Cartmell and Whelehan have also celebrated the way adaptations allow scholars to draw on multiple theoretical tendencies (2010: 22), and Westbrook sees Adaptation Studies as being able to use a "glorious plurality" of diverse theories (2010: 43-44). It seems that this theoretical approach was embedded within adaptation scholarship but was to some degree repressed. Its encouragement can be a key strategy for overcoming the problems of theorisation identified by Elliott and Leitch, becoming a postmodern approach to theorisation (rather than a postmodern theoretical paradigm) which resists master narratives and champions hybridity and pluralism in a focus on the local and particular (Elliott, 2017: 688).

This is the aforementioned 'petit-theory' approach, which rejects the all-encompassing or dogmatic attitude to theorisation, and utilises a hybrid and multiple set of working hypotheses which are not solutions or truths but frameworks of possibility which "help us think better" (Leitch, 2017: 703-4). The *raison d'être* of Leitch's definitively plural petit theories is an encouragement for the scholar to go beyond them by using them; they are

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<sup>34</sup> i.e. an adapter works with a particular reading of a text from a subjective 'theoretical' position.

vehicles, not destinations. The contrast between an interpretive community under the sway of a single consensual theory, and one in which multiple competing theories are constantly debated, is a vision of what Elliott and Leitch both desire for Adaptation Studies in terms of its altered attitude towards theorisation. Replacing Grand Theory with petit theories means that the scholar's allegiance is not demanded, and questions replace assertions, generating further questions. Leitch's methodology is dialectic and dialogic, suggesting the narrativising of problems and fields in a temporal context, as a means to solutions (2017: 705). This approach to theorisation may prevent the problems of 'wielding' theories identified by Cardwell (2002: 69) and Elliott (2014: 22), as petit theories are subordinate to the texts, contexts, media, and processes to which they are applied. They provide a methodology for studying adaptations in themselves, instead of employing them as proof of a theoretical truth, whose application solves their problematic mutability.<sup>35</sup>

This salvo from two contemporary theorists is not merely included to demonstrate a perspective on current Adaptation Studies. Instead, it sets up the approach to theorisation that is the framework for the subsequent chapters. There is no Grand Theory or meta-narrative laid out here in order to show how it may solve the problem of adaptation in *À rebours*. There is not a unifying position in terms of the methodology for analysing the text, nor a unifying ontological or epistemological philosophy from which the research begins. Instead, adaptations within the text are narrativised within the temporal context of Huysmans' experience of the *fin de siècle*, and Decadent literature's thematic preoccupations as found in the novel. This is highlighted by the desire to use the narrative and its character as potential allegories or dramatisations for concepts related to the practice and process of adaptation. Theoretical positions are evoked, invoked, and utilised throughout the thesis, but the text as adaptation(s) is never forced into an overarching theoretical framework.

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<sup>35</sup> Elliott says that "it is hypocritical to promote democratic intertextuality and intermediality among adaptations but not among theories" (2014: 35).

A theoretical pluralism of petit theories - often fragmentary - is employed in order to produce the most effective investigations of potential versions of, and figurations for, adaptation within the text. Perspectives that have influenced the direction of adaptation scholarship also influence the work here, such as the intertextual theories of Barthes and Kristeva, Baudrillard's postmodern theories of simulation, and the dialogism of Bakhtin as applied by Stam (2000; 2004). These make their presence felt predominantly through the use of an Adaptation Studies 2.0 approach to identifying concepts of adaptation, which indicates a desire to engage productively with the field, rather than skipping over the adaptation scholars in order to go back to the root theorist, in the manner which Elliott has described as part of the problem of citation (2017: 690).

Whilst post-structuralist intertextuality provides a grounding, and many other theories make their mark, there is also a sense that the heresy provided by many of the adaptations and aspects of adaptation invoked - their status as border zones and outsider examples, or debatable relations - complicates and undermines any desire to unify or align wholly with any of these theoretical structures. This makes their application fragmentary and flexible, ready to be distorted at any moment, should an adaptation require it. Here, petit theories help us to find adaptations and note conceptual resonances, but they do not draw lines of exclusion or dictate the investigations.

The methods used are similarly diverse. Whilst this is a single case study, a close reading of language and formalist concerns are one method among many, as part of a more fragmentary approach that is an extension of petit theories and Decadent part/whole dynamics. The engagements with the text frequently include methods of figuration, which seek to use *À rebours'* narrative and Decadent themes as allegories, metaphors, and analogies through which concepts of adaptation can be re-thought.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> In these methods, analogies refer to similarities across the dialogic reading of concepts of adaptation and Decadence, which can be productively explored through their description, whilst metaphors crystallise these readings in a specific figure. Bridging the two main fields and smaller theoretical clusters with Decadent themes

Adaptation itself has been conceptualised as a practice of figuration, where the adaptation is a structure formed from creative analogies, which expand on translation models of equivalence from the medium specific focus of Adaptation Studies 1.0. Elliott has examined this idea in depth in her 2003 work, and frequently suggests that figuration (particularly analogy) is a solution for combating reductive taxonomical methodologies. Similarly, figuration might be an alternative to theorisation that avoids restricting the analysis of adaptations; that if adaptations themselves can be conceptualised as figurations in their process of creation, their analysis might benefit significantly from perspectives which draw on the same ideas. This allows the adaptations to suggest the models for their own investigation. It is the method used in this thesis, where *petit theories* mean that theorisation is subsidiary to a methodology of figuration, and where adaptations are examined through analogies and metaphors prompted by their own structures and contexts.

### What?

After some discussion of the ways that Adaptation Studies is approached in this thesis, the problematic question of defining adaptation must be addressed. Taken up directly in the next section, this is the first of Hutcheon's key questions adapted for this introductory chapter. This will be broken down further into three bands: What is an adaptation? What is adaptation? What gets adapted?

The question of what constitutes an adaptation has been at the centre of adaptation scholarship since the binaries of the novel-to-film formulation were questioned. This occurred not first, but most enduringly in the second wave of Adaptation Studies, particularly through Stam and Raengo's (2004) popularisation of the model of intertextual dialogism, using the

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aims for Pollock's idea that tracing conceptual threads across disciplines can be a middle way between grand theories and local case studies, spanning the formal/cultural divide (1988, and cited in Elliott (2014: 36)).

works of Kristeva (1986), Bakhtin (1982) and Barthes (1977) to refigure adaptation as a form of intertextuality. This has been widely regarded as a “key contribution” (Murray, 2012: 3), despite this shift being characterised by Elliott as carrying the same “lapses in citation” as many other developments (Elliott, 2013: 25). These works disseminated a challenge to “dominant post-Romantic ideas” (Hutcheon, 2007: 21) of originality, uniqueness, and autonomy, dismantling the source-text’s privilege. Following this, scholars such as Leitch (2007), Sanders (2005), and Hutcheon (2006) diversified not only the network models of the way texts interrelate in Adaptation Studies, but also the medial and textual forms open to adaptive study. This diversification has continued, and is at the forefront of theorising adaptations today, where defining adaptations ‘proper’ (Leitch, 2012: 89) has become less of a concern within a creative pluralism of definition, where “the field sounds invitingly broad” (2012: 87).

With the new energies of the mid-2000s, new problems also entered the fray. One notable example is the problem of definition, where, if adaptation is read as a process that occurs within intertextual and intermedial frameworks of citational mosaics and active reading, it risks becoming subsumed within these overarching discourses. The result may be that the field becomes a neglected annex of medium-specific intertextual approaches, or is shelved somewhere within intermedial discourses, with their love of taxonomy.

The problem of defining adaptation is therefore bound up with the field’s right to exist, its justification, and the scholars of Adaptation Studies 2.0 were acutely aware of the knife-edge of risk and reward they were treading by allying adaptation with other forms of intertextuality. Some, like Sanders, kept their definitions plural and, in Leitch’s words, “vague” (2012: 88), as well as somewhat overly concerned with source-proximity, with its echoes of fidelity discussions. Leitch, as well as others like Hutcheon, has proposed definitions then followed with both proofs and counter-proofs, to highlight the proximate nature of these attempts (2007/2006). Stam and Geraghty steer clear of attempts to identify an essential

adaptation, instead offering definitions of types (2004/2008).<sup>37</sup> In looking back on this select grouping of works that in 2017 he named *Adaptation Studies 2.0*, in 2012 Leitch asserted that most theorists had avoided the quagmire of defining adaptation altogether, perhaps in fear of the “vast” problems raised by the prospect of limiting scholarship, or the swift rupture of categorical definitions by anarchic practice (2012: 88). Sanders’ description of her approach as more sympathetic to “pluralism rather than fixity” (2005: 13) seems to effectively define the attitude of theorists of adaptation over the period of the field’s intertextual overhaul.

In fact, it can be claimed that this is still the case in *Adaptation Studies*, where scholars are less preoccupied with finding the right taxonomy to isolate and contain adaptations ‘proper,’ and instead wish to keep propounding an inclusivity that both creatively expands our understanding of what adaptation might be, and simultaneously moves further from precision. This is perhaps why intermedial scholars may at times find *Adaptation Studies* exasperating.<sup>38</sup> Contemporary *Adaptation Studies* finds itself in a similar position to the theorists of the 2000s in the relationship between adaptation, adaptations, sources, and well-defined taxonomies. Corrigan, in a contribution dealing directly with the ways in which adaptation has been and is defined, comes to the conclusion that due to the rapidity of its evolution, to that quintessential metamorphic quality, a single or stable definition of adaptation is impossible. Leitch too, five years after his “inconclusive” (2012: 103) attempt to

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<sup>37</sup> Cartmell and Whelehan (1999) also discuss types or genres of adaptation, as does Stoneman (1996).

<sup>38</sup> The tone can be heard in the work of Elleström and Clüver, who make rigorous contributions to *Adaptation Studies* and argue for a more effectively shared glossary between adaptation and intermediality, with Elleström noting *Adaptation Studies*’ tendency to invent terms that isolate it from intermediality and intertextuality, proposing that if adaptation were itself to adapt to existing terms, “it would be possible to communicate across the borders of specialisation” (2013: 114). Leitch acknowledges that the terminologies of intermediality are particularly useful for broadening adaptive scope (2017: 3), and in their application to and clarifying of modes of adaptation (2012: 91). However, aside from the lack of relevance to many types of non-intermedial adaptation, from a methodological perspective there is always the danger of over-definition in intermedial approaches. Intermediality also tends to have attenuated methodologies which feel somewhat backwards looking in terms of adaptation theory, frequently becoming “enmeshed” in the “intricacies” of medium specific debates (Hutcheon, 2006: 35). An important aspect to bear in mind is that all media are intermedial (Elleström, 2017: 510) in that they are composed of multimodal aspects and can only be understood in relation to other media. Intermediality suggests that all media are constantly in dialogue with one another, and can only be analysed as such (Grotta, 2015: 19). Intermediality is defined by Elleström as the study of the relations between media types and products (general and specific respectively), which suggests his inclusion of adaptation within intermediality (2017: 510).

find the borders between adaptation and intertextuality, where he ends on the evocative image of a thousand flowers blooming in a field without constraints, is still propagating a multiplicity of definitions of adaptation (again via a visual analogy), saying that it is better to risk flinging the doors of Adaptation Studies open too wide than to create a stultifying consensus (2017: 17).

This is a key idea for the definitions of adaptation that underpin this thesis, as a reflection of Adaptation Studies itself.<sup>39</sup> Here too is a broad, flexible, and pluralistic approach to defining what adaptations are within the chosen case study of *À rebours*. This inclusivity tests the boundaries of what might be considered adaptation, but hopes to be a part of the same creative expansion demonstrated at many of the recent conferences on adaptation.<sup>40</sup> The approach also follows a work such as Elleström's intermedial approach, which shines lights on the unexamined assumptions that appear as borders for the study of adaptations, increasing the possibility for Adaptation Studies to attain wider relevance (2017: 509).

Highlighting further areas for research, and provoking new questions, means that this thesis may contribute to the advancements of Adaptation Studies, even as it looks to the literary past in order to think about where adaptation might contribute to our understanding of Huysmans' Decadent aesthetics in *À rebours*. Leitch, adapting Gide, evidences a similar impulse when he locates the value of theories not in the answers they provide, "but in their invitation to go beyond those answers" (2017: 699), and where the seeds of Adaptation Studies 3.0 will be found in the questions of current works (2017: 18). Future research is stimulated by the questions raised, rather than in any hermetic proof (recalling the previous discussions of theorisation), and Leitch avers that his loyalty as a scholar is not to

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<sup>39</sup> In 'A Recent History of the Association of Adaptation Studies,' Imelda Whelehan has noted that Adaptation Studies never feels like a crowded field, due to its "agility."

<sup>40</sup> The Association of Adaptation Studies has been a major creative hub, instrumental in creating a space where adaptations are centralised in print (the journal *Adaptation* began in 2008) and at conferences, and where media fluidity has been celebrated (e.g. in the decision to refuse to privilege media and trajectory specifications in the title of the organisation or its associated journal).

“interpreting individual texts,” but to employ those texts “as provocations to more general discussion” (2017: 703). Similarly, whilst the results of this thesis’ investigations might be to propose a reading of the adaptations in *À rebours*, in terms of Adaptation Studies, its goals are to provoke questions through gesturing outside of assumptions, proposing new models, new figures, new interrelations and resonances.

Elleström says that it is “vital to scrutinise the border zones of adaptation” and calls for works that elaborate the essences of adaptation and the borders of the field (2017: 512-3) in order to accompany the research summaries, criticism of inadequate theories, and ideas for new directions. However, he does not strive for new definitions, and leaves it to others to place the new fences. This summarises well the approach of this thesis, which examines liminal zones and suggests conceptual links in order to shed light on adaptation’s sometimes problematic, but frequently productive, border zones and essences. In the dialogues with *À rebours*, the aim is to open up pathways into areas fenced off by some and overlooked by others. Following Leitch, Sanders, and Elleström, this research focuses on broadening and scrutinising, rather than demarcating.

Adaptation Studies might reap rich benefits from dialogue with other fields, according to Leitch (2017: 17), where the danger of ignoring these is “theoretical inbreeding and conceptual isolation” (Leitch, 2017: 524).<sup>41</sup> A pluralism of definition inculcates a porosity that allows for border zones to be examined, as well as the methodological inclusivity of petit theories which provide crossovers with other fields such as intermediality and literary intertextuality. The exploration of border zones is a key way for Adaptation Studies to test its definitions and assumptions, and to broaden the field. The subsequent sections aim to indicate some of the key areas that are examined through the example of *À rebours* and the

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<sup>41</sup> This is certainly a sentiment seen in the work of Sanders (2005) and Geraghty (2008), as well as Elleström’s article (2017), which recommends cross-fertilisation with contiguous disciplines such as intermedial and literary intertextual studies.



specificities of its Decadence, as well as noting some of the more stable definitions that anchor the more liminal approaches.

### What is an adaptation?

When examining the foundational definitions that guide the research towards identifying concepts of adaptation in *À rebours*, it is initially important to note some key divisions. In Hutcheon's terms,<sup>42</sup> adaptation has a doubled existence as both product and process (2006: 22). In this research, *À rebours* is examined as (1) an adaptation in some respects, as (2) containing adaptations, (3) for the processes of adaptation that may have formed it, (4) for the way in which its narrative allegorises and dramatises processes of adaptation, and (5) for presenting a fictional world filled with the products of adaptation. This is in addition to the conceptual resonances that are developed in association with these processes and products.

Corrigan, writing in 2017, calls the adaptation product an "entity that results from [the process of adaptation] or the synthesised result of a relationship between two or more activities" (2017: 23). This is broad to the point of vagueness, illustrating that the struggles in defining adaptations are still present. The example added to the definition - the compositional blend of historical and fictional elements in a novel<sup>43</sup> - is also interestingly dissociated from conventional examples of, say, a cinematic reworking of a novel. It removes some of the crossovers with intermediality, and also suggests something of a break with intertextuality in terms of more overtly textual interrelationships.<sup>44</sup> The definition leaves room for both of

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<sup>42</sup>Though Cardwell had made this point in 2002 (11).

<sup>43</sup> This would seem to annexe all historical novels to some degree, a potentially contentious claim.

<sup>44</sup> This corresponds to a work such as Strong's forthcoming examination of the graphic novel *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* (2009).

these approaches, but in leaving room certainly throws the ‘doors’ of Adaptation Studies wide in a manner that fits well with Leitch’s aims.

Clearly, if we are to set out a working foundation for how adaptation is sought, identified, and analysed in *À rebours*, more specificity must be pursued; that even for a study encouraged by taxonomical porosity and pluralism, Corrigan’s description sheds little light on adaptation’s essences. Corrigan provides a third definition to accompany process and product,<sup>45</sup> and this is an important stage that returns to the ‘second wave’ scholars. This is “adaptation as an act of reception” in which “the reading or viewing of that work is actively adapted as a specific form of enjoyment or understanding” (2017: 23).

The relevance of various applications (Hutcheon, 2006: 76-77; Geraghty, 2008: 194) of Iser’s theory of reading (1989), where readers fill in narrative gaps, to adaptation’s doubled readings and palimpsestuous inferences is clearly apparent.<sup>46</sup> Hutcheon suggests that much of adaptation’s conceptualisation of audiences comes from the reader-response theory of the nineteen-eighties, where scholars such as Iser, Fish, and Riffaterre contributed to shifting the focus on audiences from passive modes to becoming “active contributors to the aesthetic process, working with the text to decode signs and then to create meaning” (Hutcheon, 2006: 134). The active participation of readers in making meaning in the text again recalls the work of Barthes, particularly in the way that pluralist ‘texts’ require collaboration from the reader, an engaged textual production that activates a text (1971: 163).

Barthesian intertextuality pervades Adaptation Studies 2.0,<sup>47</sup> and is important for the broad definitions of adaptation that underpin this research. Where it is possible to see an interesting distinction between adaptation as a specific kind of intertextuality, and other

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<sup>45</sup> Where it requires the doing of intertextuality and the thing done of adaptive materiality (Dicecco, 2017: 609).

<sup>46</sup> See a later section in this chapter for further discussion of the origins and use of the palimpsest as term and figure.

<sup>47</sup> Though this is not its origin point; Cohen (1979) is an example of early intertextual approaches in Adaptation Studies, and Lindsay’s 1915 work describes adaptation in terms of cinematic intertextuality *avant la lettre*, whilst reader-response theory was discussed in relation to adaptation by Boyum in 1985.

types, is in the way that much of intertextual theory sees the term as “essentially a relational concept that focuses not on texts *in se* but on the relations between them” (Palmer, 2004: 258), where intertextuality is not the ‘interweaving’ that the word suggests, but the notion that texts instead “resonate across the gap that separates them” (Hillis-Miller, 2005: 126).

Activated<sup>48</sup> adaptation’s palimpsestuous quality might be seen to include more interweaving in terms of describing a resonance between texts which actually reshapes (via dialogism) both of those texts, a distorting resonance which describes equally the lacuna and the secondary text, as well as reshaping the source. Here we can additionally see that adaptation requires a particular intertextual reception, but also in its acknowledgment and dialogism evokes purpose and process in a way that literary intertextual approaches tend not to do. It is not only the reader that determines the adaptation’s status, but a balance between adapter (purpose), text (acknowledgment), and reader (activation). Whilst other intertextual forms are predicated only on the reader, the adaptation requires more proof and purpose in the text. Adaptations and their study might therefore be seen as operating with a less rigidly post-structuralist version of intertextuality, where authors still live.

Hutcheon says that in a reception context, adaptation is a form of intertextuality, for the texts are experienced “as palimpsests through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (2006: 8), meaning that adaptation is “unavoidably a kind of intertextuality if the receiver is acquainted with the adapted text” (2006: 21). An adaptation, a latent version of a text purposefully created as such, is activated in its reception by a knowing audience, becoming a palimpsest, where a particular layer of its intertextual ‘films’ (to use Geraghty’s term) becomes definitive in determining the text’s identity as an adaptation.<sup>49</sup> Therefore every text has its intertextual dimension, and within this either one,

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<sup>48</sup> i.e. a text experienced as an adaptation by the reader due to the acknowledgement of a particular intertextual relationship.

<sup>49</sup> Hillis-Miller describes latency as “parallel to the way a ghost does not vanish entirely when it is exorcised. It hovers somewhere waiting to be “raised” by the “appropriate invocation” which may never come (2005: 146).

or multiple intertextual relationships may be activated and read as an adaptation. This occurs through the audience's recognising reception, a reception which itself adapts,<sup>50</sup> reshaping the text as an adaptation, a palimpsestuous instance of intertextuality. An adaptation is made in the observation, and whilst an adaptation as an individual text is not inherently a palimpsest, it has inherent palimpsestuous potential. Adaptation is therefore defined to a large degree by reception - the intertextual framing of adaptation - but this is not the be all and end all of its examination through Adaptation Studies. Instead, this is, as Corrigan suggests with the tripartite definition, one third of its existence, though this existence is predicated on all three aspects being present. Adaptation Studies, however, may focus more or less on these different sectors in the attention it gives the adaptation.

This is agreed amongst most modern scholars of adaptation, and was a consensus among dominant theorists of Adaptation Studies 2.0. Adaptation is a quintessentially intertextual practice according to Leitch (2012: 100), fitting somewhere indeterminate on a "continuum" of intertextual relations (2012: 89), a position echoed in the work of Sanders (2005: 17). Similarly, Hutcheon identifies the need for the adaptation to be "directly and openly connected to recognisable other works," with that connection being part of the formal identity of the text, and also its "hermeneutic identity" (Hutcheon, 2006: 21). This keeps under control the "static" of other intertextual parallels that are not specific or extended, where adaptations coalesce out of the field of intertextual potential to become definite identities, based on the audience's knowledge which simultaneously perceives and constructs. What must also be noted here is the need for a study of adaptation to be aware of the interaction between the adaptation thread, and the other intertextual threads within the text.

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<sup>50</sup> As in Corrigan's previously mentioned idea of reading as active adaptation (2017: 23), similar to McFarlane's positing of interpretation as personal adaptation (2007: 15).

Locating the text's status as an adaptation in the way that a part of its intertextuality is activated by an observer might suggest that criticism, as a work of adaptive reception,<sup>51</sup> creates an adaptation by studying it as such, opening the way for texts to be studied as adaptations even if they are not conventionally or broadly acknowledged as adaptations. Indeed, this is a trend that is seen in works-in-progress at adaptation conferences, where textual case studies are mined for their adaptive status.<sup>52</sup> This makes Adaptation Studies clearly similar to other approaches to intertextuality - so why would we choose a methodology that draws from Adaptation Studies rather than a literary model?<sup>53</sup> Perhaps if we are interested in rejecting Grand Theory, in studying the adaptation for itself rather than as proof for a theoretical paradigm, or if we are interested in exploring approaches currently cast out from much intertextual discourse, such as intentionality. This will be explored further as this section progresses.

In defining an adaptation, then, we have foundations to work with, but nothing overly restrictive. We have a specific - to use Hutcheon's term (2006:21) - intertextual relationship, activated by an audience through their own knowledge to become a palimpsest. But how does an audience gain this knowledge, and what do we mean by palimpsest?

The audience gains the necessary knowledge through specificity, through the acknowledgment of the particular intertextual relationship that is being examined as an adaptation. The intertextual field may contain multiple acknowledged source texts - potential adaptations - and some may be foregrounded more than others, giving them a denser adaptive mass (likelihood of adaptive reception). However, this field also contains the static of

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<sup>51</sup> Corrigan actually describes criticism as a subjective "textual and intellectual adaptation" (2017: 26). This is a reversal of the way that previous critics have also described adaptation as criticism, e.g. Pellow (1995) and Sinyard (1986), whilst Wagner (1975) and Jorgens (1991) describe adaptation as commentary and interpretation in related ideas.

<sup>52</sup> A tendency perhaps also shaped by the twenty-minute format.

<sup>53</sup> Cutchins actually says that an adaptation approaches an ideal application of the concepts of intertextuality because it requires us to focus on the relationships every text has with other texts (2017: 71).

all of the intertextual associations that may be made in the reception, but which are not specifically acknowledged, and require more of an interpretive leap. Various adaptations can therefore be studied within the examination of a particular text as an adaptation - a polyvalence explored throughout the thesis, but it is also important to note the need to study adaptation in terms of the text's intertextuality as a whole network.

This thesis' identification of a multiplicity of adaptive strands within an adaptation is a departure from many of the Adaptation Studies 2.0 theorists, whose work implies that a single acknowledged source must be dominant and engaged with at the forefront of the entire work; something often made possible through acknowledgment in the title and paratext. In this respect, one challenging idea of adaptation in *À rebours* is present and acknowledged in the title's associations and occasional translations as 'against nature;' i.e. the notion that a collage of representations of nature are adapted in the text as a single source (an idea unpacked in detail later). However, more relevant here is the idea of an adaptation being multiple, where *À rebours* is studied as an adaptation comprised of various strands which are simultaneously engaged in its intertextual layer.

The notion of adaptations as inherently "palimpsestuous," to use Michael Alexander's term, cited in Ermarth (2001: 47) and popularised by Hutcheon (2006: 6), as Genette's texts in the second degree (1997: 5),<sup>54</sup> is a central concept to thinking through adaptation here from the sides of both creation and reception. This is in addition to the structural sense, following Barthes (1977) in working from the basis of a 'text' rather than a 'work.' The palimpsestuous view of an adaptation sees it as an aesthetic object in its own right, but only able to be studied in terms of adaptation through the "doubled format," which Hutcheon summarises as "a plural stereophony of resonances" (2006: 6); its particular mode of intertextuality.

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<sup>54</sup> Stam's use of Genette has itself been called an adaptation by Cartmell (2012: 7).

In terms of the reception context and the definitions or conceptualisations of adaptation described thus far, the palimpsest might be considered as a useful image for thinking about the degree of audience awareness, the adaptive reception that is generated by acknowledgment in the text. The palimpsestuous quality of adaptations is their intertextual dimension, their oscillation and simultaneity, generated by the active reception of acknowledgment. The variation in palimpsests is interesting for the way in which the same figure comes to represent the well-trodden ideas of proximity to the source, suggesting a spectrum which ranges from deep trace writing perceived only through the chemical archaeologies of scholarship,<sup>55</sup> through to a source text with a fine tracery of new material on top, which is an image of fidelity adaptation.<sup>56</sup>

If a degree of acknowledgment perhaps separates adaptation from other intertextual forms, an idea which easily becomes vague,<sup>57</sup> there must also be other qualifying ideas of definition which might aid in identifying adaptations. One particular concept found in the work of Adaptation Studies 2.0 theorists is the extensive nature of the engagement. This is present in the work of Hutcheon (2006: 22), and Sanders (2005: 8), and is an assumption for many others. The extended engagement is difficult to quantify, especially since it is unclear whether the acknowledgment needs to be extensive, or whether it might be citational whilst the adaptation itself is extensive in its usage, without being consistently and directly invoked.

This is tested via many of *À rebours*' posited versions of adaptation. A strong case might be made for the novel as an adaptation of Baudelaire's poem 'Anywhere Out of the World,' from which the themes and (non-) narrative of the work seem to derive,<sup>58</sup> yet this is

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<sup>55</sup> An adaptation in the ill-defined border zone with other, less acknowledged intertextual versions, such as Huysmans' novel as an adaptation of Flaubert's *The Temptation of St. Anthony* (1874).

<sup>56</sup> e.g. a text like Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998).

<sup>57</sup> Which becomes a tested border zone in this thesis, where self-conscious citation and objectification within the narrative serves as an acknowledgment which seems to make a variety of texts adapted sources in the novel.

<sup>58</sup> In a forthcoming work, Strong describes the author biopic as short-circuiting authored texts as sources (8), where these are fragmentary and held together by the reframing of a life as an originary text, and this is certainly the case in the analysis of Huysmans as adapting a Baudelairean heterocosm. This encompasses themes, texts,

not extensively acknowledged, only clearly cited in its objectified presence within the narrative world. In the examination of *À rebours*, adaptations are often described in terms of an extensive engagement with a work, which is acknowledged only as a synecdochical fragment, cited on the text's exposed intertextual surface. Whilst much of the intertextual layer is therefore acknowledged, the extensive quality which is necessary for the appellation adaptation lies in how the text is utilised in the work. For example, Petronius' *Satyricon* - though argued for as signalling another adaptation taking place<sup>59</sup> - is in itself not adapted, but merely intertextually acknowledged, whereas Baudelaire is adapted.

A revision of an aspect such as the 'extensive' in Adaptation Studies 2.0 scholarship questions the boundary between adaptation and intertextuality. By scrutinising this, we might consider how Decadent versions of adaptation become a mode of collection in *À rebours*, as well as participating in Leitch's request for the testing of "suspicions" regarding the limits of 2.0 approaches (2017: 5). The associated debates and questions may then sow the seeds of Adaptation Studies 3.0 (2017: 18). In the fragments of acknowledgment which often highlight the multiple threads of adaptation dominating the text's intertextual fabric,<sup>60</sup> we also see a locus for the connections between Decadent themes and modes of adaptation: fragmentation, collection, self-conscious artifice.

Fragmentation is not only important at this level, but also at the level of defining an adaptation itself. In fact, in this research adaptation is not always invoked at the level of whole adaptation products, or as a whole, consistently defined term, but often in terms of pieces and aspects of adaptation. These may not always be unique to adaptation, or at times may be part

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and aesthetic theories, which are held together by the figure of Baudelaire as the Decadent representative of tragic life as art, in an adaptive structure that joins a work like this in examining less conventionally textualized forms of source for adaptation.

<sup>59</sup> That of the conventions of Naturalism.

<sup>60</sup> In Des Esseintes' examples of changing taste, the character cites three novels that could be interpreted as being adapted simultaneously in *À rebours*: *La Tentation de Saint Antoine*, *La Faustin*, and *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (Huysmans, 1956: 166).



of categories subsuming adaptation, but they are all examined in order to inform an investigation of adaptation's margins and their interactions with the text and its concepts of Decadence. At times associative readings and rhetorical pathways are also followed, leading from extrapolated aspects of adaptation which chime with or relate to Decadent concepts drawn from the novel, through to the reasons for these formal or thematic attributes within the text.<sup>61</sup> These investigate the places where adaptation can be read in the aesthetics of *À rebours*' Decadence, positing its purposeful embodiment of themes, but they do this in order to open up new avenues to conceptualisations of aspects of adaptation, or ideas linked to adaptation, which might be productive for further study.

Multiple terms for adaptation as product are invoked throughout this thesis, and whilst these might destabilise the sense of a coherent idea of what an adaptation is in these investigations, this is a key part of the move away from inherited doctrines, and the operation at the boundaries of Adaptation Studies. The diversification of terminology and the employment of a panoply of figurative terms for aspects or versions of adaptation serves the dual purpose of suggesting links between versions or parts of adaptation and Decadent aesthetics in *À rebours*, and for pointing to new concepts for examining adaptations. Sanders is a particular influence here, as she has argued for this kind of radical expansion of the ways in which adaptation can be conceptualised in terms of both interdisciplinary terminology and figurative models (2005: 40).

Adaptation here is multiple and arguable, an extension of its versatile and multifaceted presence in Adaptation Studies. In the discussions of adaptive echoes in *À rebours*, adaptation may be illuminated via synonyms, as a sub-category of a larger term, through traits shared with a separate concept, and as resembling a concept drawn from Decadent themes. In this research, a text may be an adaptation in multiple ways. An adaptation, as a textual identity

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<sup>61</sup> An echo is found in *À rebours*, where Des Esseintes describes how he uses "etymological definitions as a springboard from which to leap in pursuit of fresh ideas, joined together by links that were sometimes rather tenuous but almost invariably original" (Huysmans, 1956: 144).

activated by reception, may lie alongside other adaptations within the text's intertextual network, and all of these may be activated at the same time. The text's adaptive identity is activated through an interaction between a reader and a node of acknowledgment, which may be only a small allusive citation. What needs to be extensive is the text's usage of that source text, which is again an aspect whose existence lies in the hands of reception, but which suggests intention and the extended interaction of process. This version of an adaptation is also frequently problematised throughout, as these definitions tend to be in adaptation scholarship. It builds on the intertextual adaptation theory of Adaptation Studies 2.0, whilst moving in new directions in order to challenge assumptions. In the application to *À rebours*, ideas of fragmentation, decay, artifice, memory, and collection, are utilised in dialogue with the concepts of adaptation to examine their presence in the novel, and what they - as versions of adaptation - might suggest in terms of a reading of adaptations within a Decadent text.

### What is adaptation?

Adaptations as products are brief moments of stability within a constant process of rewriting.<sup>62</sup> Acknowledged rewritings themselves, they are rewritten by readers to take on their adaptive identity in reception, before being frequently rewritten to become part of a subsequent text's intertextual network. Adaptations expose the creative process and the flux of texts, their openness connecting a textual ecology (Leitch, 2017: 700), an idea taken up in Chapter Six. Hutcheon notes that adaptations are both "(re)interpretations and (re)creations"

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<sup>62</sup> Described by Bryant as the fluid text with its many versions (2002), including intermediate stages like the screenplay as analysed by Boozer (2007), which are often neglected (Elleström, 2017: 519). In this research, intermediate stages of adaptation come under scrutiny, particularly in terms of considering the adapter's creative process and the role played by memory. In the discussions of Des Esseintes' '*osmazome*' or De Quincey's dreams, which he saw as intermediate assisting works (Hayter, 1968: 103/127), ideas of the adapter's personal intermediate versions are evoked, where memories become intertexts within the networks of process, altering creative rewriting just as more conventionally textual intertexts do. This tests ideas of textuality and media regarding the process of adaptation and its crossovers with representation and intertextuality, locating these within an analysis of the narrative world and the adaptations undertaken by Des Esseintes with regards to the curation of a personal past utilising the house's *mise-en-scène* and the practice of *ars memoria*.

(2006: 172), where the creator is also required to reinterpret, and the reader is also required to recreate via Leitch's adaptive concepts of literacy and rewriting (2007). Whilst again the indeterminacy of definition is present, this section aims to present some of the conceptual foundations for how adaptation as process is examined in the research, based on these ideas of reinterpretation and recreation.

The type of process engaged with across these two interactions - what Corrigan calls the in-between of adaptation (2017: 32) - may again be conceptualised via a panoply of different terms and figures, which emphasise the variety of approaches available to the adapter. Stam calls adaptations themselves "transformational movements and energies" (Stam, 2004: 10),<sup>63</sup> highlighting the fact that an analysis of an adaptation sees it as the end result of a creative metamorphic process of transformative palimpsest creation. The meaning of an adaptation as an adaptation is determined through the transposition of elements from the source text, whether through alteration, reshaping, recontextualisation, or other versions. Adaptive creation is the balance of collage and invention central to intertextual theory, as well as to Eliot's canonicity in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1921), and Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973). These differing terms for the in-between process tend to suggest the type and amount of change that occurs between the source and the adaptation, often discussed through the ideas of proximity previously inherent to the dual case study model; but they also hint at an interlinked attitude on the part of the adapter.

For Sanders, 'appropriation' is assaultive (2006: 4), denoting forceful change and ownership, whilst remediation or pastiche may suggest an attempted replication of tropes lacking creative change.<sup>64</sup> In this thesis, new terminologies are suggested for the process of

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew (1984), Pellow (1995), and Stoneman (1996) have all examined the adaptation as predicated on the transformation of a source text. Adaptation as energy might be considered as adaptation divorced from textual specificity - as creative impulse within the adapter, as a process awaiting texts, as an eco-force in the textual universe, or an intertextual latency, which may be activated to become the creative process of adaptation.

<sup>64</sup> Andrew (1984), Hoesterey (2001), Bolter and Grusin (1999), and Bouillaguet (1996) have all discussed versions of adaptation that are variants of postmodern pastiche, which are similar to the notion of fidelity remediation here.

adaptation, or parts of it, just as they are for concepts relating to the product. The figurative language evokes attempts to identify the particularly Decadent engagement with adaptation being practiced within the aesthetic paradigms of *À rebours*, in addition to finding new ways to think about aspects of adaptation.

Notions of entropy and decay are utilised to examine the ecology of texts and the disassembling of sources by adapters, whilst attempting to convey the fragmentation of the world into representations required by the Decadent adapter who wishes to build their artificial paradise. Similarly, ideas of ornamentation that interact with the image of *À rebours*' famous tortoise seek to convey the suffocating adaptation of Naturalism's collecting *flânerie* in Huysmans' inventory-based Decadent style. In combination with decay concepts, these also seek to provide a perspective on modes of fragmentation that might be seen to describe the relationship between interpretation and rewriting in the process of adaptation. This is matched by the way that curation provides an important locus of ideas around a different form of this process (recontextualisation and rearrangement). These terms build the bridges between the concepts of adaptation and Decadence, allowing a consideration of the particular forms of adaptation found in *À rebours*' Decadent aesthetics, and the reasons for inclusion, but also providing models which might be utilised again in other Adaptation Studies contexts. However, as with the product, the process is also underpinned by more conventional definitions.

Corrigan sees adaptation as often describing "how one or more entities are reconfigured or adjusted through their engagement with or relationship to one or more other texts or objects" (Corrigan 2017: 23). This is another example of an extremely open definition, where the kinds of texts involved - previously a key avenue for defining adaptation - are not especially relevant. Instead, the process of reconfiguration and adjustment becomes definitive, where the etymology of the term suggests how much adaptation is predicated on infidelity, on transformation. Corrigan's terminology, as well as the example used of the

omissions and additions made in representing a particular historical event in a novel, suggest that there is much scope for broadening what we think of and analyse as adaptation.

In other examples, Corrigan chooses the adaptation of an individual passing from one culture to another. In this research, the adaptation of an individual is taken into the realm of self-adaptation through writing,<sup>65</sup> of an author writing themselves into an adapted version of their previous life, having found answers in textual experimentation which - in Huysmans' case - is argued to itself be using strategies of adaptation to work through concepts.

Huysmans is argued to evolve from Naturalism to Catholicism by passing through Decadence, an adaptation of the writer through experiments in fiction which can themselves frequently be analysed as adaptations.

One of the reasons that the character Des Esseintes' narrative world is examined in such depth here is that in the creative projects that Huysmans writes for him, we can see adaptation as process within a Decadent aesthetic framework in a way that is far more accessible than it is for his author. Due to the novel being an account of Des Esseintes' project of creating the house at Fontenay as a great text, a creative configuration, and because Des Esseintes as a character has a much more straightforward relationship to Decadent ideas than his author's ambivalence, the novel might be suggested as an account of a character who undertakes a work of Decadent adaptation(s). In examining the narrative in this somewhat realist way, processes of adaptation that are aligned along purely Decadent ratios come to the fore, a notional adaptation constructed by Huysmans, where we might see him using his character to unpack Decadent ideas, and to reveal them as metaphysically wanting.

When thinking about versions of adaptation as process within the novel, adaptation is again defined and presented as multiform. At times the process remains unfinished or is merely microcosmic and fragmentary rather than an engagement across the whole text, as

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<sup>65</sup> Jellenik says that the concept of self-adaptation emerges in 1790, reflecting Enlightenment notions of individuality, and referring to a conversion (i.e. Saul). It is a phrase only possible under Romantic notions of self (2017: 39).

well as being fictional or notional when undertaken by the character. The idea of change is always present (in relation to author as well as texts), and indeed the argument is made that mimesis is a concept that haunts the Decadent adapter with associations of lost aura and the return of the repressed. This is in contrast to modes of adaptation whose reformulations allow for change.

The processes of adaptation analysed here frequently question notions of what constitutes adaptation. Elleström has attempted something similar through a challenge to the assumption that adaptation involves narrative tropes, where even Hutcheon's broad medial range is limited by the focus on stories. Elleström refers to the traits adapted as transmedial compounds, saying that these may well include, but are not exclusively, narrative traits. The failure of narratological perspectives to acknowledge everything that is adapted crops up in the long-running 'spirit' concept in Adaptation Studies, but Elleström sees this as a gap in theorisation, stating that it is uncommon to find adaptive analysis of non-narrative media characteristics, and even rarer to find adaptation scholars attempting to define these additional adapted components (2017: 517).

In this thesis, this border zone is examined through the ways that Huysmans adapts non-narrative themes and forms<sup>66</sup> to create the novel, whilst Des Esseintes adapts the intertextual collage of his past experience of the world<sup>67</sup> through recontextualisation to the adaptation which is his house at Fontenay - particularly its interior *mise-en-scène*.<sup>68</sup> These approaches, along with many of the more microcosmic versions of adaptation identified, do not evidence processes of narrative alteration.

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<sup>66</sup> Such as the museum, or Baudelaire's thematic heterocosm derived from multiple critical and poetic works.

<sup>67</sup> Mediated in objects which are memory loci.

<sup>68</sup> *Mise-en-scène* is a term whose associations are conventionally tied to traditional film-based discussions of adaptation. However, it is useful here for its links to ideas of textualised space and symbolic effect, as well as being akin to an aesthetic museum in its curatorial modes of construction. The interior as text becomes a way to analyse the fragmentary adaptations and curations undertaken by the character within the text, that extension of the author and archetype for the Decadent figure (Reed calls Des Esseintes an "aesthetic ideal" rather than a living type (1985: 22)).

This approach comes predominantly from the source text, which is often described as a novel without narrative,<sup>69</sup> as well as from Decadent aesthetics generally, which is often defined by style over narrative (Reed, 1985: 9). In this research, adaptations of transmedial compounds disassociated from narrative are the norm, such as adaptations of style, of critical position, of aesthetic doctrine, of theme, of image, of memory. Even in terms of more conventional texts, non-narrative works predominate: whether poetry, criticism, architecture, or objects.<sup>70</sup> What is adapted is variously conceptualised as atmosphere, critical position, philosophical position, thematic preoccupation, cultural subtext, or visual composition. An analysis of these adaptations shines a light on the compounds that might dwell within a work's 'spirit,' and whose examination might accompany and diversify the adaptations of narratives elsewhere.

This is also an important part of analysing Des Esseintes' adaptations within the world Huysmans creates for him, where Huysmans reveals the Decadent adaptive process by having his character undertake adaptations where he is adapter and audience, and where the author reveals the mental processes that accompany this. These analyses get closer to examining the importance of adaptation for a fictional mindset that is aligned along Decadent aesthetic ideals, such as its ability to embody important themes, but also again diversifies Adaptation Studies by examining border zones that go further into intentionality, the textuality of memory, and the simultaneity of thought needed for the conception of an adapted work.

The processes of adaptation encompass the creative reading and rewriting<sup>71</sup> of a source or sources, which alter these in various ways in order to engender a new version, which may then be activated as an adaptation. Here, they are examined for their significance

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<sup>69</sup> Halpern and Weir both state that via the 'Notice' prior to Chapter One, the narrative is announced as being over before the novel truly begins (1995: 94; 1978: 93-5).

<sup>70</sup> This pursues Elliott's idea that "under a fully interdisciplinary theory of adaptation, every movement between forms and media can be an act of theorisation 'about' intermedial relations" (2014: 37).

<sup>71</sup> This term being open and inclusive, including ideas such as recontextualisation.

for the adapters involved. Adaptation as creative process is posited as an important part of Decadent creation, whilst Decadent examples of adaptation as a process help to illuminate liminal modes of adaptation and consider relevant concepts for these processes of change, such as artificing, decay and ornamentation, collection and curation, or via memory intertexts of adaptive reception and projection.

### What is adapted?

In considering adaptations, and particularly the process of adaptation, the idea of the source text is important to consider. This is particularly due to the long-running focus on medium specificity, which for many years kept Adaptation Studies grouped around the novel as a source text for a cinematic adaptation. Indeed, this is still the case for scholars such as Cartmell and Whelehan, who feel that this medial grounding keeps adaptation from becoming conceptually obsolete in its diversity. However, in recent years, since the investigations into novelisations by those such as Baetens (2005) and Strong (2012), and the allying of adaptation with intertextuality,<sup>72</sup> the media involved in adapting a source have become less relevant for many theorists. Adaptation Studies now examines the full media spectrum, and has also broadened the idea of the source text beyond conventional single, unified source texts.<sup>73</sup> The diversification of media involved in adaptation - both as source and as adaptation - has been an important part of questioning the assumptions of the field.

A continuation of this broadening might include challenges to the idea of text and medium themselves.<sup>74</sup> This is a logical extension of the Adaptation Studies 2.0 framework that

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<sup>72</sup> Stam's work importantly destabilised the hierarchies of original and adaptation (2004, 2005), removing authority and focus from the source text (as noted by Sanders, 2005: 3) and returning it to the adaptation itself, shifting the Adaptation Studies methodology.

<sup>73</sup> e.g. Hutcheon's heterocosm (2006: 14).

<sup>74</sup> Media is here taken predominantly as media types rather than single media products, which are here designated as texts. This goes against a theorist like Elleström, who uses the term media for both, but brings a



underpins the approaches, where the influence of Barthesian intertextuality and semiology brings a textualising drive to Adaptation Studies. In these frameworks, everything might be considered a text (Pfister, 1991: 212).<sup>75</sup> Textuality itself is therefore expanded radically, following the work of Leitch and Hutcheon in particular, whose work has evidenced this shift away from more conventional notions of mediated textual products, moving further into the liminal areas of Adaptation Studies.

Leitch's analysis of historical master texts or microtexts (2007: 82-3) is useful for questioning these ideas and introducing notions of adaptation from 'notional' sources. These were also touched on by Sanders (2005: 148), while Andrew and Cardwell had both discussed historical films as adaptations and history as a fiction (2005: 191; 2002: 17) in an incorporation of intertextual views. Tutan has recently expanded the ideas of adapting history, arguing that histories in the plural reveal the fact that all historical representations are radically adaptive, that historical understanding is a subjective process, and that history is always textual and fictional. Suggesting that history is fiction and fiction history, and that all creators and representations are discursive, Tutan calls for historical studies to embrace their status as analyses of adaptations in order to liberate history from monopoly (2017: 576-585). This radical perspective is a useful precursor for the ideas of adapting Nature or reality in Huysmans' novel.

Similarly, the examinations of 'based on a true story' works as adaptations of a kind of mediated yet not conventionally instantiated interpretation of reality (Leitch, 2007: 286-303; Brinch, 2013: 223) are useful for the acknowledged absence or disembodied status of their

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degree of clarity in distinguishing between the two. It is worth noting that this thesis works from broadly Barthesian versions of the text, as mentioned previously. In addition, form/content is conceptualised via looking glass analogies, borrowing from Elliott's metaphor for adaptations, where in this version adapted content always ghosts form, and vice versa. As noted by Gaudreault; while content might be divorced from form in the "pseudo-media" of the brain (though even here I would argue that it retains the vestiges of its previously encountered form), it must be expressed in form and incarnated in medium specificity, which always adapts content to fit its formal idiosyncrasies (2004: 62-3).

<sup>75</sup> Cutchins has also discussed the ubiquity of textuality in the work of Bakhtin, who places adaptation at the centre of textual study (2017: 71-3).

sources. The idea of adapting a heterocosm, a fictive world or *res extensa*, is also a challenge to the solidity of adaptive sources, and represents one of the more dominant modes of adaptation in today's multi-platform and hyper-marketed world of textual simultaneity (Hutcheon, 2006: 14).

Adapting the "malleable field" of history (Corrigan, 2017: 27) would, for Elleström, move Adaptation Studies out of intermediality "if it were not for the fact that history always reaches us in mediated forms" (2017: 517). These ideas are taken into more liminal zones in this thesis, considering memory as a medium<sup>76</sup> inscribed by human processes, where the personal past is instantiated and may therefore be adapted as intertext and source. In areas such as this, the research utilises concepts from Adaptation Studies as a mode of intertextual analysis applied to 'texts' which are not texts in terms of conventional definitions. It is also at times a mode of intermedial analysis, though transpositions within a single medium are examined, as well as texts or configurations not based in a conventional media form.

Elleström makes the case that Adaptation Studies tends to assume that "adaptation is a transfer of media characteristics among media products, not qualified media," and that the field generally ignores the fact that when a source is adapted, not only the textual tropes but also the more general media tropes are adapted (2017: 514). This is arguable, as - according to Leitch - Adaptation Studies 1.0 was based around translation models of medium specificity which considered the individual tropes as a composite with those of their medium (2017: 3), and Elliott and Hutcheon have stated that both media products and qualified media are adapted (Hutcheon, 2006: 95). However, it is Elleström's contention that Adaptation Studies does not generally embrace this idea, and that the text-text model of adaptation frequently fails to examine the way that media type characteristics are adapted; essentially, that

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<sup>76</sup> Following Walter Benjamin (2005: 576), who discusses the memory in terms of a medium, where images, thoughts, and experiences are made available to the conscious mind through the media of memories (2005: 576) - Grotta employs this formulation too (2015: 159).

Adaptation Studies operates on too much of an intertextual grounding, and not enough of an intermedial one.

The idea of conventions as a legitimate source for adaptation<sup>77</sup> is utilised in the examinations of *À rebours*. However, what is attempted here is a further exploration of the edges of this assumption by utilising monomedial conventions, arguable or liminal media, and notions of style or aesthetic theory as conventions similar to the idea of those of qualified media. This is part of the destabilising of the source text that follows Leitch and Hutcheon's example, and the evading of purely narratological perspectives. Media types such as the museum exhibition;<sup>78</sup> genre forms such as the inventory text; literary styles such as Zola's Naturalism; and even ephemeral and arguable media forms such as memory, with its formal genre of the memory palace, are examined as ways to consider this liminal zone between examining adaptations of media products and media types. These are all proposed as structures, configurations, or texts that might be adapted. However, they are diversified in terms of type, pushing further towards liminality, and further complicated by their fictional representation within the narrative, as well as their contribution to the construction of the novel.

From the intermedial perspective, Elleström also notes that Adaptation Studies focuses almost exclusively on artistic or 'premeditated' media (2017: 516). There is little work done that examines the adaptation of sources derived from reports, transcripts, etc., though Leitch's aforementioned work on both history and 'based on a true story' films gets close (2007: 82-3/286-303). Perhaps this is ignored due to its threat to the demarcating line between intertextual adaptation and representation, but the lack of investigation in this area is coupled with a lack of theorisation about why these sources should not be part of Adaptation Studies. This thesis moves into this territory at times, considering the Decadent relationship to

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<sup>77</sup> This idea obviously has significant ramifications for the border between genre theory and Adaptation Studies.

<sup>78</sup> Here considered in the form of the museum as a genre within the medium of object arrangement, a set of conventions that, when adapted, organise the way that fictional objects within the text are arranged.

everyday source material or nature-based subject matter for representation as - under a proto-intertextual approach to aesthetics - perhaps a better fit for theorising as adaptation than as representation.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, the non-artistic and 'casual' subject matter of dreams and living subject matter (the tortoise) are both read as sources for adaptation within the narrative, whilst in the novel's form, critical assessments of Latin works, rooms described second-hand,<sup>80</sup> and lists of objects all contribute to an investigation of the assumption that adaptation only applies to premeditated artistic media, even when under a Kristevan intertextual paradigm which suggests that everything might be considered a text.<sup>81</sup> By utilising media and textual forms implicitly dismissed by adaptation scholars, this thesis questions the lines drawn by adaptation scholarship that determine what constitutes a text, implying tensions within the intertextual theories Adaptation Studies 2.0 relies upon, and shining a light on problematic border zones.

One of the primary areas for this is in the pervasive assumption, recently challenged by contemporary theory and practice, that adaptations have a single precursor source. Adaptation as intertextuality is part of a diverse interrelating network of various media within the text, and the insubstantial nature of the single-source assumption was noted by Cattrysse prior to Stam's publications (1997: 222-30). Cartmell and Whelehan also challenged this assumption directly in the first issue of *Adaptation* (2008), whilst Leitch included it as one of his 'Twelve Fallacies' in 2012. However, the focus in Adaptation Studies still tends to remain with single bounded sources. There has been little extended analysis of examples of

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<sup>79</sup> Andrew and Cardwell have both called attention to this problematic boundary line (1984: 97; 2002: 15), but neither examines it through an extended engagement with an example.

<sup>80</sup> Mallarmé describing Robert de Montesquiou's house to Huysmans (Baldick, 1955: 122), which includes a version of Des Esseintes' sledge, which he got into "in the hottest period of the year," sitting in furs until he convinced himself that he was really cold (Huysmans, 1956: 158).

<sup>81</sup> Pfister says that for Kristeva, "everything - or, at least, every cultural formation - counts as a text within this general semiotics of culture" (1985: 8).

adaptation from multiple source texts in the same or different media, and little theorisation of this process and its results.<sup>82</sup> However, in a definition of adaptation such as “an acknowledged transposition of a recognisable other work or works” (Hutcheon, 2006: 8), there is clearly room for this.

What is not examined in the approaches that do acknowledge the potential multiplicity of sources is the way that adaptations may take these multiple sources on an equal basis and combine them as a single source text, which is adapted into the new text. This sees a section of the intertextual constellation adapted, a source text formed of multiple (potentially intermedial) texts, and still backdropped by the more allusive and less acknowledged or purposeful intertextuality of other influences.<sup>83</sup> The common current mode of heterocosmic adaptation<sup>84</sup> requires a similar approach to its theorisation, for the source is multiple and often multimedia; a fragmented collage-text drawn from a larger intertextual network, a source constructed by the adapter, rather than existing independently as a coherent and bounded media artefact. Elleström notes the possibility for multiple source media being

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<sup>82</sup> Strong’s forthcoming work on the author biopic as heterocosmic adaptation (a useful parallel for the relationship between *À rebours* and the work of Baudelaire in this thesis) is an example of the growing number of challenges to this assumption. It examines the TV series *Fleming: The Man Who Would Be Bond* (2014) as a fragmentary adaptation drawing from multiple source texts within and containing various other forms of intertextuality. This work also presents an important confluence in its discussions of cinematic Bond intertexts as coalescing into a “mental construct” (4) for the knowledgeable audience, which is in effect the source adapted. This is not only a destabilised single source text, but also a subjectively variable collection of source texts (including historical and factual texts) existing only as a coherent source in the medium of memory, a notion that has distinct relevance for the explorations of not only collections in *À rebours*, but more pertinently for the idea of the *ars memoria* explored in Chapter Five.

<sup>83</sup> A modern adaptation of a text like *Dracula* (1897) is not adapting Stoker’s novel, but a source-network formed of multiple texts in different media, as Leitch has noted (2007: 207) - Stoker’s novel, the stage play, certain illustrations (as Elliott has proved is often the case (2003)), Murnau’s *Nosferatu*, the Universal or Hammer adaptations, Herzog’s *Nosferatu the Vampyre*, Coppola’s adaptation - as a single collected source. Other less purposeful engagements fade into the background, but underpin these more intentional and acknowledged/extended engagements. Cutchins and Perry (2018) have discussed *Frankenstein* in these terms. In fact, adaptations from well-known sources might usually be structured on a specific collection-source which is lifted from the vast intertextual heterocosm of that source (including the eponymous work), creating a mosaic adaptation where various intertextual fragments can be activated to reshape the collection - which is the adaptation - depending on the audience’s prior experience.

<sup>84</sup> We might consider a mainstream example as one of the recent *Star Wars* films, which, as transmedia narratives, are a collection of fragments orbiting a gravitational centrepiece, a mosaic whole which is adapted from multiple source texts, and adapts only parts of these intermedial source texts: a description which also fits the central form of adaptation in *À rebours*.

adapted into a single work, and vice versa, where a single source text may be adapted into multiple versions simultaneously, as in transmedia storytelling (2017: 519). This is a key liminal zone explored through the engagements with *À rebours*, particularly regarding the ideas of fragmentation and curation.

Decadent collection, as explored through Huysmans' intertextuality, including adaptations, as well as through *Des Esseintes* in a reading of the narrative world, is an approach that relies upon recontextualisation. It is the creation of new arrangements of existing materials into a new text - the collection as text in itself. This means that multiple sources are lifted from the intertextual layer to be given more reflexive acknowledgment and purpose in their usage. They are adapted to form new works, but they are adapted as a single source made of multiple works. The analysis of this process would therefore have the potential to suggest a model for adaptation from multiple sources to a new work.

Two of the primary adaptations proposed and analysed in this research also utilise a mode of heterocosmic adaptation from a multitude of sources in various media forms. These are Huysmans' formation of the richly intertextual novel - particularly the acknowledged and purposeful intertextuality that rests visibly on the surface - and the notional adaptations-by-proxy within the narrative, in the formation of the Decadent retreat by *Des Esseintes*.<sup>85</sup> Many of the intertexts intersect, as it might be considered that Huysmans' novel is actually an *ekphrastic* 'adaptation' of the notional source of *Des Esseintes*' house. Though many other forms of adaptation, contributing and separate, are analysed here, these two are the broadest forms subjected to the most extensive examination. They are analysed as collection-texts that adapt from multiple sources taken as a single collaged source representing a heterocosm,<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> The "refined Thebaid," the dream of the "desert hermitage equipped with all modern conveniences, a snugly heated ark on dry land in which he might take refuge from the incessant deluge of human stupidity," where he can deaden "the thunderous din of life's inexorable activity" (Huysmans, 1956: 8).

<sup>86</sup> The modern outside world of Paris, a reality symbolized by nature, even as the novel functions as an allegory for the way that nature is suppressed in the modern city. *Des Esseintes* scours the suburbs for a district "unspoilt by rampaging Parisians," yet he cannot flee altogether: he desires to be far enough away for the "tidal wave of Parisian life" to be unable to reach him, and yet "near enough for the proximity of the capital to strengthen him in

where the process of adaptation is a recontextualisation and stylisation into a new text in a new medium. Huysmans' text is the novel, but within that novel, we can read the story of an adapter who, in a *mise-en-abyme* representation of his creator, adapts the multiple sources of the mediated world, and his own past, into a new architext of interactive *mises-en-scène*.

Derived from Decadent predilections for collection, and guided by analogical thinking around Decadent themes, a model for adapting from multiple sources as a single source text is derived through the concept of curation. An extended analysis of a single case study explores a particular instance of adaptation in a mode overlooked by much of contemporary Adaptation Studies,<sup>87</sup> a border zone. A conceptual model is then evolved for this adaptive mode as a process. This informs the study of Decadent collections, Decadent creation in *À rebours*, and Huysmans' experiments with temporal transcendence in fiction. It also provides a new model for adaptation scholars to explore as a key form of modern adaptation, via a historical version of this practice. Combining Decadence and adaptation therefore allows an illumination of both in terms of ideas regarding curation, based in the questioning of an Adaptation Studies assumption only intermittently tested - the single source.

An associated component of this is the notion of fragmentation, a recurrent concept in this chapter and the thesis as a whole. Another of Elleström's compiled assumptions, one of the border zones identified, is that adaptation is a transfer of media characteristics among complete media, not parts of media (2017: 519). Whilst the intermedial scholar's focus is with those characteristics tied to media types, this can extend into the realm of the text as much as the media in which it is expressed. Elleström notes that the impossibility of fidelity in any absolute sense means that adaptations are always engaging with their sources as fragmented, as this is where deviations occur. Adaptations are rarely considered as adapting fragmentary

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his solitude" (Huysmans, 1956: 10). Like all of Des Esseintes' inversions, perversions, stylisations, and adaptations, he requires a doxa against which to define himself, an acknowledged source or Other which constructs the boundaries allowing for opposition. This is explored further in Chapter Two.

<sup>87</sup> Hence its appearance in 2003 as one of Leitch's fallacies, then again in Elleström's 2017 assumptions.

sources rather than stable full texts, and the notion of adaptations as themselves fragmentary is not generally dwelt on (Elleström, 2017: 519). Fragmentation is important within the Decadent aesthetic, which is so often defined by the decay or metastasis of parts becoming independent, so fragmentation in Decadent adaptations is expected, and is a useful way to explore this concept and its relationship to adaptation more generally.

This is especially due to the idea that fragments being adapted fragmentarily would seem to break with Hutcheon's frequently accepted definition that requires an extended engagement with another text in order to identify adaptation. However, a model for a particular kind of adaptation such as the adaptation of a heterocosm would seem to require a notion of adaptation that accepts the extended engagement with a collection of fragments, and the subsequent fragmentariness of the adaptation itself. The idea of fragmentation as an important concept in terms of the adapter's engagement with the source, as well as a mode of adaptation that looks to multiple source texts that are often fragmentary, is a mode that is argued for as particularly Decadent in its engagement with key aesthetic and thematic ideas such as decay. This moves the analysis closer to identifying what a Decadent mode of adaptation might look like. However, it is also proffered as a border zone whose exploration contributes to our understanding of where adaptation's boundaries are drawn, and where modern and/or past practice undermines those demarcations and prompts us to find and conceptualise more diverse modes of adaptation. This often occurs through analogous concepts such as curation, which is suggested by the particulars of the Decadent examples found in the creation and narrative of *À rebours*.

The notion of the source text is at the root of the ways in which we define adaptation as process and product. As with the case study, the recurrent focus on source texts as embedded in the text that adapts<sup>88</sup> is a way to refigure an aspect of prior Adaptation Studies

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<sup>88</sup> The acknowledgment of intertextual citation for Huysmans, and of objectified, fetishised presence for Des Esseintes.



methodology, which had been seen to hold back the field. The previous focus on a source text as primary within a dualistic case study model is here revised to be an examination of multiple unusual versions of source texts that test the notion of what can be adapted in an adaptation, within a single case study. This destabilises not only the notion of the kind of text that gets adapted, but also the medium within which that text is manifested.

### Where?

Taking on the ideas of fragmentation, form and content, figurative conceptualisation, and a multiplicity of arguable versions of adaptation, the *where?* of adaptation requires exploration. This section seeks to outline some of the loci for adaptation within Huysmans' novel. To begin with, the idea of looking for adaptation both in the form and in the content requires some situating, in that it is an unconventional approach - however, it will be considered in more depth in the *who?* section which examines the adapters involved.

*À rebours'* intertextuality is investigated for instances that might be read as adaptations, where certain acknowledged intertexts are explored for their extended shaping of the whole work, which is considered as an adaptation of multiple fragmented sources against a backdrop of dense and highlighted multimedia intertextuality. The adaptations in this sense often derive from Huysmans' key influences, such as the heterocosm of Baudelaire's work, which is a source for the themes and aesthetic approaches within the novel. This is in addition to sources from the novelist's personal, cultural, and literary past; such as the conventions of the Naturalist style, the collection practices associated with *bibelots*, etc. These frequently challenge concepts around how adaptations are identified and defined.

In addition, the content of the novel, the narrative and the diegetic world it contains and implies, is also examined for ideas that might be connected to concepts of adaptation. This allows for an exploration of what might be termed Decadent adaptation, i.e. versions of

adaptation which are conditioned by Decadent approaches to aesthetics, which might lead us to form conclusions around the way adaptation might be considered as a significant component within Huysmans' approach to the concepts of Decadence in *À rebours*.

The allegorising of adaptive processes undertaken 'by' the novel, in the novel, is a similar idea to Stam's assertion that *Don Quixote* "thematizes the issue of adaptation [...] by bringing up story sources as relayed by different media" (2005ii: 36). Other precedents to this investigation of *À rebours*' adaptations are also prefigured in Stam's analysis of this novel, not least in the archaeological pretext of adaptation *avant la lettre*, but also the investigations of allusions, of pre-empted criticism, of fictional intertexts invoked, and in adaptation as a technique of artifice.

The utilisation of Decadent concepts found within the novel's content as figures for thinking through concepts of Adaptation Studies is a participation in a figurative tradition found in both intertextuality and Adaptation Studies. Even Decadent literary studies employ some similar methods, where Ziegler's work is characterised "by a penchant for dense verbal play, the use of conceptual metaphors as tools of analysis, and a multidisciplinary approach" (King, 2006). Huysmans' own art criticism is also something of an influence, relying as it does on impressionistic transpositions (King, 2004: 15). Critical fragments (themselves adaptations) are often transposed in the other direction, from criticism to the novels, in order to unfold an aesthetic philosophy through exegetical *ekphrasis*.

*À rebours* features the same technique, for the Salome *ekphrases* are the most memorable loci for the Decadent aesthetic and its thematic/stylistic nexus. In critical works such as *L'Art Moderne* of 1883 (1927, 1996), we find extravagant *ekphrases* and intermedial adaptations of style embedded within the more Baudelairean Salon criticism, with Huysmans saying that "quite apart from the opinions in the book, I wanted to try to put prose poems in it, to write it like a novel" (Gamboni, 2011: 129). This links to Decadent aesthetic ideals of the critic as artist and vice versa, so memorably expounded by Wilde (1891). Additionally, it

recalls Baudelaire's Salon criticism, where the subjectivity of the critic in engaging with the work is more important than anything objective about the work, with Brookner seeing Baudelaire as "a living justification of the art of criticism" (1971: 85-6).

In terms of the key figurations in Adaptation Studies, Andrew's use of the palimpsest metaphor (2004: 190-191) marked its growing influence, filtering through from Genette to become an integral figure for exploring adaptation, and one utilised throughout the analyses of *À rebours*. Geraghty takes this up particularly effectively in evocatively describing "an accretion of deposits over time, a recognition of ghostly presences, and a shadowing or doubling of what is on the surface by what is glimpsed behind" (Geraghty, 2008: 195). The palimpsest is an important contributor to this research in both fields, and its presence in the work of De Quincey (1845) is a notable introduction of the figure. It is used as a metaphor for analysing memory textually (and texts memorially) and is significant in the fact that De Quincey has an indirect influence on Decadent literature via Baudelaire. The palimpsest is a figure describing the structure of many activated adaptations, where in acknowledgment the source becomes visible (yet distorted) as a once separate now composite text read through the adaptation, the two now inseparable.

The palimpsest was famously utilised by Genette (1982) before being adapted by Stam (2004), becoming a key trope for the work of Hutcheon (2006) and Geraghty (2008), as well as those operating within intertextual theory. Lara-Rallo actually places the palimpsest as representing one of the two broad trends of visual metaphors for intertextuality, where one branch is that of artistic creativity, utilising textile metaphors, and the other is based in presence/absence dynamics, characterised by the palimpsest (2009: 106). Andrew also employed architectural analogies in the Stam & Raengo *Companion* of 2004, exploring palimpsestuous ideas through figures of churches (2004: 191). Sanders' discussion of musical terms (2005: 153) is a useful demonstration of a similar approach in its focus on cross-disciplinary conceptualisation, whilst her call for theorists "to develop a more dynamic

theoretical vocabulary to describe and mobilise these processes of response” (2005: 155) evokes both figuration’s potential and the key motivation behind its use as method. Sanders crowds her text with analogies from diverse disciplines in order to better understand adaptation and find new angles on its theories, discussing the centrality of creative metaphors to the study of adaptation, as it develops a “kinetic vocabulary” which looks forward (2005: 40).

Geraghty says that the use of metaphor in adaptation scholarship is one of its most “striking features,” and a key method of theorisation, describing Stam’s metaphor of the intertextual whirl as both influential and “dramatic,” whilst Elliott’s are seen as “brilliantly” extended (2008: 194). Stam examines framings of fidelity through its figurative lexicon, where parasitism and murders abound (2004: 3), as well as discussing plant metaphors (2004: 2) and Darwinian analogies derived from the themes/narrative of the film *Adaptation* (2002) as a way to conceptualise adaptations; a similar method to the use of *À rebours*’ themes as ways to think through its adaptations.

In parallel, the “foundational statement” (Lara-Rallo, 2009: 91) of intertextuality is Kristeva’s employment of a figurative description of intertextual structure in the visual metaphor of the ‘mosaic’ (Kristeva, 1986: 66). This was preceded by Barthes’ textile metaphors (1977), and Bloom’s *tesserae* (1973); both examples of “the practice of characterising textual intersections through specialised terminology borrowed from other disciplines” (Lara-Rallo, 2009: 95). For Barthes, the only truly useful method for defining the ‘text’ and intertextuality was figuratively, through metaphor and analogy (1977). In this thesis, the development of figurative language, including extended allegorical readings of certain parts of the text, is a key method for thinking about adaptation in terms of Decadent themes. Reading the text’s adaptations in terms of metaphors derived from its content becomes a part of the case study methodology of microcosm and macrocosm that seeks to

argue that adaptation, conceptualised through a dialogue between concepts of Adaptation Studies and Decadent studies, is a crucial part of *À rebours*' Decadent aesthetics.

### Who?

Returning to the form/content idea of considering adaptations within the text's narrative<sup>89</sup> in addition to those inherent to its formal construction, the figure of the adapter, or adapters, needs to be considered. This is an important part of this thesis' version of "examining how the fact of adaptation is referred to or used in the text" (Leitch, 2007: 5), the exploration of the way that adaptation can be read directly, allusively, or allegorically within the narrative world of *À rebours*.

Voigts has argued that modern Adaptation Studies must focus on what people do with texts rather than the ways they interpret them (2009). A key thread of argument in this thesis is that through analysing the relationships between concepts of adaptation and concepts of Decadence, as generated by *À rebours*, conclusions may be suggested regarding the significance of adaptation within a context that takes into account Huysmans' literary career, his biography, and his engagement with what may be conceptualised as a Decadent ontology.

This requires the relocation of a degree of intentionality in the adaptive methodology - the more conventional *where?* of adaptation being joined by a less-frequently explored *who?* and *why?* - as a way to suggest thematic reasons for adaptation's presence in the personal Decadent poetics of Huysmans' *À rebours*. This goes against the grain of much literary theory of the last 50 years and is seemingly at odds with the intertextual framework of the Adaptation Studies 2.0 theorists, but as we shall see, it is precisely those theorists who posit the re-inclusion of intentionality for investigations into adaptation, and therefore suggest a modified approach to intertextuality through Adaptation Studies.

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<sup>89</sup> Frequently the source and inspiration of figurative conceptualisations of adaptation.

It is important to state that this research does not necessarily seek Huysmans' intention as something stable and recoverable, as a direct reflection of biography and a kernel of truth that defines the text. On the contrary, the Adaptation Studies perspective requires the openness of texts. Instead, what is proffered is a consideration of what adaptation (*avant la lettre*) might have meant for Huysmans through its function in the novel, its dramatisation within the content of the novel, and its conceptual echoes with the Decadent themes of *À rebours*. This is, of course, always a critical interpretation of what Huysmans might be using versions of adaptation for, and may be posited as both conscious and unconscious inclusion, based on contextual and textual ideas.

An analysis of authorship based on intention and purpose perhaps seems a backward step at first glance. However, it seeks to challenge critical prejudices, where "adaptation teaches that if we cannot talk about the creative process, we cannot fully understand the urge to adapt and therefore perhaps the very process of adaptation" (Hutcheon, 2006: 107). Huysmans is particularly conducive to the project of reintegrating intentionality in Adaptation Studies, for the author claimed to put more of himself into his work than any other writer (Baldick, 1955: 340), seeming to confirm a thread within most studies of Decadence that tends to conflate authors with characters (Ziegler, 2009: 11).

Huysmans is often read in his characters, with his biographer, Baldick, saying that: "it is clear that Des Esseintes became the repository of Huysmans' secret tastes and untold dreams, and that in their sickly sensibility, their yearning for solitude, their abhorrence of human mediocrity, and their thirst for new and complex sensations, author and character were one" (1955: 123). However, to observe any kind of absolutist version of this theory is to neglect the fact that characters such as Durtal, Jacques Marles, and Des Esseintes are radically different in many respects, despite sharing some characteristics. Ziegler posits the figure of the asymptote as a summa for the Decadent author's relation to their protagonist. In this analysis, which reframes Baldick's comments, the Decadent character is a composite of

projected aspects of the author, the latter being a curving line that bends towards the straight line of their character and then dissociates. In Ziegler's conception, Huysmans' line "nears but never meets" (Ziegler, 2009: 12) the line of Des Esseintes.

This revises many traditional notions of the relationship between Decadent characters and their authors, for it shifts the primary drive of a Decadent work from indulgence to exorcism, perhaps serving to explain the temporary nature of a Decadent 'period' in many of the writers' *oeuvres*, where - as with *À rebours* - the most Decadent work appears in a moment of transition. Here the process of authorship becomes "transformative" (Ziegler, 2009: 12), a projection into fiction of destructive traits which, when fictionalised, "are transcended" (2009: 13). Hence Decadent fiction becomes for many a "paradoxical quest for health" (2009: 12), an "adaptive" strategy that catalyses a forward movement, making of Decadent art an unexpected and "dynamic act of creative regeneration" - a purposeful adaptation of the self via the sublimating crucible of art. The novel is therefore a diagnosis, with Ziegler also calling *À rebours* "a purifying exercise" (2009: 237), allowing connections to be made between the adaptations in *À rebours*, the Decadent poetics and its mediated ontology, and the preoccupations of this author and his "autobiographical" *oeuvre* (Baldick, 1955: 480), in terms of a self-adaptation through textual exorcism and experimentation.<sup>90</sup>

Both Huysmans and Des Esseintes are therefore taken as examples of Decadent creativity in this thesis. This works on the foundation of Ziegler's asymptote, but also posits that Des Esseintes is not only an avatar for his author, but within the fictional world he inhabits, he is also an idealised Decadent creator. Uninhibited by the constraints of economic class and practicality imposed upon his author, Des Esseintes is free to undertake Decadent

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<sup>90</sup> This corresponds to the wider view of those such as Buvik when it comes to the motivations for Decadence, where many writers "wanted to magnify and expose common tendencies in society in a *critical* manner. They used a type of Decadence that could function as a *corrective* to the wide-spread development of decadence, which was veiled by optimistic progressive ideology" (2001: 25). Huysmans' relationship to Decadence is ambiguous, often paradoxical, and changes throughout his life. However, the argument unfolded throughout this research fits with both this larger framing from Buvik, and its personal version in Ziegler's asymptote, evoking Chesterton: "the decay of society is praised by artists as the decay of a corpse is praised by worms" (1986: 401).

projects of creativity within the life-as-art mould for which Dorian Gray would become the greatest tragic example.<sup>91</sup> In comparison to (though of course a part of), Huysmans' creation within the constraints of literary form, Des Esseintes, taken on his own terms as a Decadent creator, is free to indulge in pursuits aligned with Decadent ideals in a way that reality was unlikely to offer.

Therefore, we might consider the actual Decadent creation of the novel on the part of Huysmans as one example of creativity within a Decadent aesthetic, but we might consider the imagined undertakings of Des Esseintes within that novel as a more quintessential example of Decadent creativity. If we take Ziegler's point, Des Esseintes is the true Decadent, in the entirety of his restricted fictional existence, whilst Huysmans merely passes through a Decadent phase in his literary career.<sup>92</sup> If we wish to consider the Decadent approach to adaptation, then it seems that Huysmans' novel as artefact can provide only one - medially restricted - example. Delving into the world of that novel shows us a notional version of Decadent creativity unbounded by media and corresponding as closely as possible to the essences of Decadent aesthetics.

To analyse Des Esseintes as a character undertaking his own creative projects not only moves the research further from literary intertextual approaches, but also provides a dense world of unconventional media forms and approaches to creation, all organised by a rigorous Decadent framework of aesthetic tropes. Des Esseintes, as imagined Decadent artist, is a doorway into a world rich for contemplation of 'notional' adaptations that diversify our conceptualisations of what constitutes adaptive practice, even as they draw us closer to what might be defined as Decadent adaptation. Attached to this is the idea of Decadent adaptation's significance for the authorial subject who participates in it, pointing the analysis back to Huysmans through the *mise-en-abyme* of the asymptotic experiment.

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<sup>91</sup> A character who is himself an adaptation of Des Esseintes (Reed, 1985: 38).

<sup>92</sup> As Baldick notes in his tripartite division of Huysmans' life (1955).



In general, Adaptation Studies has, since the second wave of the mid-2000s, tended towards the framing of author debates via the structuralist and post-structuralist frameworks disseminated by Stam and Raengo.<sup>93</sup> These “fissured the author as point of origin of art,” problematising the conventional notions of the author as a coherent producer of purposeful, stable meaning, where instead the Lacanian self as “a discursive fiction,” only apparently unified, was brought to the fore (Stam, 2004: 9). Foucault suggested that the value placed on traditional modes of authorship suppressed intertextuality as a culture/text/reader formulation of meaning in works (1998: 20). The subsequent privileging of the latter nexus in intertextuality meant that meaning, previously ascribed to authors, was re-conceptualised as being created by readers in intertextual activations. Bakhtin’s conception of the author was utilised by Stam, with artistic utterance as a “hybrid construction” in the intertextual process, and consequently also dependent upon reception, with the author as conduit, an “orchestrator of pre-existing discourses,” transmitting meaning from a network of influences (2004: 9).

In terms of classical intention, literary studies “stopped talking about these dimensions of the creative process” some time ago, where even in the 1950s the approach was “beginning to sound dated” before it was “entombed” by Barthes (Hutcheon, 2006: 106). Hutcheon makes a strong case for this major shift being more about academic fashion than lack of merit (2006: 107), and it has been argued by Patterson that much of the rejection of intentionality stemmed from “the force of professional self-interest in the self-propagation of Modernism in the arts and of literary criticism as a professional discipline” (1990: 146). This became a reclamation of meaning and authority from creators on the part of critics, who become the arbiters when the focus is on the text and its reception.

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<sup>93</sup> Prior to this, Truffaut’s 1954 attack on the ‘tradition of quality’ installed many of the enduring illusions of the Romantic author in cinematic adaptation, hampering the theorisation of collaborative authorship in adaptations. The adaptation industry’s subsequent appropriation of the auteur figure has been effectively dissected by Murray (2012) and Leitch (2005; 2007: 239).

However, this was perhaps too radical a swing. Sanders says that the post-structuralist death of the author cannot be seen to be entirely true in an intertextual context (2005: 3),<sup>94</sup> where authorial intention is “inescapable” in studying the motives for adaptation (2005: 81). She claims that that the study of these motives is central to theorising the practice, which is inherently concerned with “analysing process, ideology, and methodology” (2005: 20). Geraghty too discusses ideas of authorial layering in collaboration, suggesting that when discussing cinematic adaptations, these films “equate meaning with authorial intention” more than any other (2008: 197).

Stam, in writing about film, calls for a new balance to be found to see authorship “not as the expression of individual genius but rather as the site of encounter of a biography, an intertext, an institutional context and a historical moment” (Stam, 2000: 6), where the boundaries of authorship are made porous and networks predominate. Marcus contends that the adaptive process is a network formed from institutional cultures, signifying systems, and personal motivations (1993: x), and in this version, authorial intent works not as a “controller” (Hutcheon, 2006: 111), but as part of “the recursive relationships among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response” (Phelan, 1996: 19). However, there is a sense that this has not been extended fully to consider adapters as authors in their own right, as creative individuals - except for the important yet medially niche work on screenwriters (Boozer, 2007).

There is a notable lack of discussion of intention in terms of not only the layers of meaning that are formed in the palimpsest, awaiting activation, but also in terms of the functions that the process of adaptation, and the products it forms, have for the authors involved: the significance of adaptation in itself for adapters. Hutcheon actually sees an increasing interest in this kind of intentionality in many other areas of academia, “despite a

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<sup>94</sup> Elliott says that adaptation defies Barthes’ author death and Foucault on the author as impeding the recomposition of fiction (2013: 35).

half-century of critical dismissal of the relevance of artistic intention to interpretation” (2006: 94). This does not necessarily posit a return to authorial authority and stable meaning outside of shifting cultural and intertextual contexts, but instead a return of this contributing factor to these perspectives as a way in which they are shaped through the decisions of the creative/adaptive process.

In this research, adaptation’s creative transpositions are subject to the demands not only of context and medium, but also to the “temperament and talent” of the adapter, and their “individual intertexts through which are filtered the materials being adapted” (Hutcheon, 2006: 84). This is a particularly important idea for the analysis of ‘personal’ intertexts, such as memories, and where these might be thought of textually, or where they might be amenable to analysis from an adaptation standpoint. This approach, looking at the way (in Benjamin’s memorable phrase) “traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel” (1968: 91), has been “sidelined” in literary studies. However, the “deeply personal” seems as relevant to study as the culturally or historically conditioned, a neglected aspect meriting serious consideration, “even if this means rethinking the role of intentionality in our critical thinking about art in general” (Hutcheon, 2006: 95).

The focus on the creative process of adaptation and how it can, through intentionality, accrue meanings that embed adaptation as process within the work in a significant way, conditions many of the approaches to adaptation in *À rebours*, where decisions made in the adaptive process derive from a wide variety of sources, including the personal, and are made in a “creative as well as an interpretive context” (Hutcheon, 2006: 108). This makes the work of creation just as worth studying as the text’s reception, mediating the starkness of the post-structuralist framework, as well as its seemingly awkward fit with ideas of authorship in Adaptation Studies.

In the reading of concepts of adaptation in terms of Decadent themes found in *À rebours*, the explorations of resonances led to a question regarding the significance of these echoes: a *why?* of adaptation. What is suggested is that Huysmans is purposefully engaging forms of what we might term adaptation for their ability to encode aspects of Decadent themes. This extends to the content of the novel, where in the *mise-en-abyme* of his character's 'architextual' project,<sup>95</sup> we can see a proxy author experimenting with these same ideas in more unusual, dematerialised forms. These allow a conceptualisation not only of new ways of thinking about adaptation, but concepts of adaptation shaped by their interaction with Decadent aesthetic ideals.

The extension of this is that through the explorations of these ideas in the narrative and the form of the novel, Huysmans seeks to test the ability of Decadent aesthetics to provide a meaningful escape from a world lacking meaning.<sup>96</sup> Adaptations are argued to be a part of the way in which Decadent creators transfigure the world, and Des Esseintes, as an avatar adapter within the narrative, undertakes extreme versions of Decadent modes of adaptation that might also be traced in the form. These are read through Huysmans' thematic preoccupations as modes of transcendence which fail - as dramatised in the narrative - but which push Huysmans on past Decadence towards the spirituality which will be the salve he seeks. The re-integration of intentionality on an authorial (Huysmans) and allegorical level (Des Esseintes) explores the decisions of Decadent adapters in this case study and considers how thinking about adaptation can help us to consider literary intention in new ways, just as thinking about Decadence can find new conceptualisations of the use of adaptation by adapters.

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<sup>95</sup> Des Esseintes' house at Fontenay-aux-Roses is created and read by its dweller in the manner of a text, a meaningful configuration.

<sup>96</sup> Huysmans has Des Esseintes sum up the "spirit of the age" as "idiotic sentimentality combined with ruthless commercialism" (Huysmans, 1956: 161).

## How?

In addition to the modes of adaptation discussed thus far, one particular form which merits discussion here is the idea of *ekphrasis*, as this is a border zone for Adaptation Studies which can be utilised as a conceptualisation of the *mise-en-abyme* link between Huysmans' project and that of his character, as well as suggesting ideas that become further liminal areas for investigation through their place in *À rebours*.

The tradition of *ekphrasis*, often defined as “a verbal representation of a visual representation” (Sager, 2008: 13), is another example of a practice of transposition related to adaptation which has presented problems of definition, and from which “students of adaptation have declined to profit” (Leitch, 2012: 93). Frequently quoted as representing a starting point for interart debates, the painting as “mute poetry” of Simonides of Keos, along with Horace's famous ‘ut pictura poesis,’ are frequently discussed in terms of *ekphrasis*. The concept truly developed as an area of critical study in the 1950s, primarily through the work of Hagstrum (1958) and Spitzer (1955). More modern conceptualisations have moved away from the poetry focus of this scholarship into “*ekphrastic* passages in verbal narratives and their functions” (Clüver, 2017: 460). This is the way in which *ekphrasis* is approached as a mode of adaptation in *À rebours*.

*Ekphrasis* has primarily been used to name a sub-division of intermediality, though it has consistently produced categorical debate (Dalle Vacche, 2003: 242), and this is the case for its relationship to adaptation as well. Leitch has posited adaptations as ‘counter-*ekphrases*’ (2012: 92-94) in their most conventional medial formulation, though he noted the problem of narrative for this definitively descriptive mode. The necessary inscription of a visual/verbal dichotomy might also be problematic for theorisations in terms of adaptation when the latter is broken from medium specificity, or when observed in the light of Elliott's inherency (2003). However, this does not necessarily preclude the applicability of adaptation theory to

*ekphrases*, nor does it restrict the form from being considered as a type of adaptation - though Trabucco (2011: 150) sees *ekphrasis* as a form of *mise-en-abyme* more than adaptation, in its encoding of a gaze and lack of palimpsestuous individuality.

Stam describes *ekphrasis* more in terms of a tool available to cinema and cinematic adaptations, an extra layer of intermedial intertextuality within a full adaptation (2005i: 24). He discusses *ekphrases* on a similar level to references or quotations within adaptations; smaller intertexts represented literally, or metaphorically invoked through an imitation of procedures and amplified within the multiplicity of cinema's textual layers. This chimes well with the uses of *ekphrasis* in *À rebours*, where individual *ekphrases* work in microcosm alongside others, and within other modes of intertextuality, intermediality, and adaptation to create layered mosaics of adaptive approaches.

Clüver defines *ekphrasis* as "the verbal representation of real or fictive configurations composed in a non-kinetic visual medium" (2017: 462). A medial configuration is what Clüver defines as "objects that can be intermedially transposed" (2017: 462) or "transmediated" in Hutcheon's terms (2006: 11). It is what this thesis calls a 'text,' something which is represented in a media form, or considered as a representation (such as Des Esseintes' house). In *ekphrases* of fictive configurations - what Hollander has called 'notional *ekphrasis*' (1988: 209) - the reader constructs a subjective internal conception of the visual work from the descriptions present in the text.

The fact that the texts or medial configurations adapted in *ekphrases* may be fictive is important for the examination of the relationship between Des Esseintes' creative works, both in terms of those collected and the collection in itself, and Huysmans' representation of them. Des Esseintes' static, dead world, as a collage of texts, of artificial, authored representations, becomes an *ekphrasis* in its transposition to the configuration of the novel, through Huysmans' densely descriptive style. A further aspect sets up the analysis of Huysmans'

*ekphrastic* representation of Des Esseintes' diegetic world; the flexibility of the 'non-kinetic visual medium.'

*Ekphrasis* is not limited to the representation of graphic art forms; in fact, in the example of Homer's famous *ekphrasis*, or Keats' vase, we can see that its attachment to objects is perhaps even stronger. Clüver's definition includes architecture as potential source, including fictional architecture, as well as objects and non-representational works. This encourages the extended analysis of Huysmans' use of *ekphrastic* representation when it comes to Des Esseintes' house. The analysis of these types of *ekphrastic* representations is based in an idea of their being *ekphrases* when the verbal representations are taking up a viewing position, a transposing/describing position, which views these sources "as meaningful configurations" (2017: 462) - as texts. As well as palimpsestuous reading in the evocation of the prior text, and a degree of 'extension' in going beyond allusion - both of which seem to posit *ekphrasis* as a particular medium-specific type of adaptation - the idea of acknowledgment is a further aspect necessary for *ekphrases*. It is the necessity of an indication for the *ekphrasis*' representation of a representation (Clüver, 2017: 466), of their artifice in terms of a distance from reality.

*Ekphrasis* is here taken as "an *enargetic* representation of non-kinetic visual configurations as semiotic objects" (2017: 473), such as paintings, architecture, aesthetic objects such as bound books, or a *mise-en-scène*. The description must verbalise perceptions of existing or fictional configurations in a verbal medium, producing "a mental image of configurations in a visual medium." Due to the way that adaptation is taken to be without medium specificity, and addressing not only altering processes of transposition, but also versions of descriptive transpositions in an inclusive methodology, *ekphrasis* is here considered as a particular genre of adaptation, when it is studied using a methodological framework from Adaptation Studies. It should not be discounted from being adaptation on

account of its lack of narrative, just as *À rebours* is not discounted from novelistic status for the same reason.

*Ekphrasis* becomes a way to conceptualise the *mise-en-abyme* representation of Des Esseintes' Decadent project by Huysmans as itself a 'notional' adaptation, exploring a problematic border zone that this aspect of *ekphrastic* discourse suggests. Whilst Huysmans adapts within the novel's intertextuality, and Des Esseintes is argued to adapt in the creation of the architext, *ekphrasis* is posited as a way of conceptualising the relationship between these two texts as itself a model of adaptation. This employs the framework of the 'notional' *ekphrasis*.<sup>97</sup>

While Des Esseintes' fictional posited adaptations are extremely diverse in terms of media and textuality, Huysmans' conform more closely to conventional forms of intertextuality and intermediality. However, it is in the fragmentariness and the concept of curation<sup>98</sup> that we determine a key conceptualisation of where adaptation is being suggested to be present in the form and content of the novel. Huysmans and Des Esseintes are both posited as adapting fragmentary collection texts via methods of curation to form newly arranged and fleshed out collections. Huysmans does this in the formation of the novel's intertextual layer,<sup>99</sup> and he has Des Esseintes form an analogous text in the narrative via the adaptation of various fragmentary memory-palimpsest objects and artworks to the text of the house, itself a honeycombing of 'texts.'<sup>100</sup> The exploration of the two texts (the novel and the house it represents) as, and containing, adaptations allows an exploration of the border zones mentioned previously, the products and processes which test definitions of adaptation. Both adapters utilise modes of fragmentation, collection, and curation as versions of adaptation

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<sup>97</sup> *Ekphrastic* discourse is described as beginning with notional *ekphrasis*, in Homer's description of Achilles' shield.

<sup>98</sup> As an extension of the work done by Potolsky (2013) on Decadent collection, as well as Sitzia (2015), Zimm (2007) and others on the Decadent interior.

<sup>99</sup> An adaptation containing adaptations alongside other forms of intertextuality.

<sup>100</sup> House/*mise-en-scène*/rooms/tableaux/individual works.



that engage Decadent themes such as artifice and decay, with Des Esseintes' project a fictional, allegorical extension of Huysmans' experiments with Decadence.

These particular methods and modes of microcosmic and macrocosmic adaptation in form and content are important to analyse not only within their Decadent and Huysmans studies context, but also for thinking broadly about teleological approaches to adaptation tending towards the present. With Decadence as a late Romanticism (Reed, 1985: 11) or an early Modernism (Weir, 1995), with Huysmans as a nostalgic modernist (Donato, 2004), and the *fin de siècle* as an interregnum symptomatic of accelerating modernity (Bernheimer, 2002: 11), this period and one of its most representative movements and practitioners may give a key insight into the development of adaptation as a cultural form.

Examining adaptation in relation to Decadence as a literary nexus that emerges from dialogues with modernity aids in the investigation of Corrigan's assertion that "modernity itself might be considered the gateway to the emerging centrality of adaptation as a cultural and epistemological perspective." He argues that postmodernism continues this, accentuating and highlighting adaptation as "a principal form of contemporary representation and knowledge" (2017: 27). Adaptation has become a ubiquitous transmedial twenty-first century practice, essential for postmodern strategies that employ bricolage, pastiche, and collage to sift and reassemble the fragments of history.<sup>101</sup> These fragmented forms of adaptation have not been examined in extended studies, and there are few models for their processes or applications.

This thesis takes many of these forms as its main sites of adaptation study, but crucially arguing that they are just as important to Decadent creative practitioners like Huysmans as they are to postmodern collagers. If, as noted by Huysmans' character Durtal in *Là-bas*, the end of centuries all look alike (Huysmans, 2001: 219), it is perhaps no surprise to

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<sup>101</sup> Julia Przybos has examined the way that Decadents resemble rag-and-bone men in the way they too gather discarded remnants from the past (2016). This idea is examined in depth through ideas of collection as adaptation in Chapter Four.

find echoes in the form of practice and the approach to adaptation, where both postmodernism and Decadence look for ways to reassemble the decaying past. In analysing the fragmented collections of Decadent adaptation in *À rebours*, we may identify modes and models of adaptation relevant to the contemporary mediascape. Through historical resonance, it might be found that approaches to adaptation inflected with Decadence can suggest models and concepts for aspects and forms of adaptation that inform current Adaptation Studies, rather than being only of their moment. These are some of the questions this study aims to evoke.

### Why (and when) does Huysmans adapt?

This thesis narrativises the adaptations found in *À rebours* within a context of Huysmans' literary career and life, particularly through the themes of aesthetic time drawn from Donato's work on temporality in Huysmans' novels (2004), ideas of escape from reality into illusion in Antosh's influential work (1986), and Ziegler's ideas of the asymptote (2009), as well as the conversion trajectory which he maps through Huysmans' literary career (2004). This framework, supported by a variety of other engagements with Decadent studies, and the petit theories of Adaptation Studies and other contributing theoretical structures, allows an investigation into the frequently elided *why?* of Adaptation Studies.

Relocating intentionality within an intertextual approach to adaptation, and utilising figurative conceptualisations of adaptation that place the practice in dialogue with Decadent themes drawn from the novel, Huysmans as adapter is read within the context of his time, life, and works, and particularly through the notion that *À rebours'* narrative can itself be read as an allegory for Huysmans' engagement with Decadence and the adaptations posited within its aesthetics.

Huysmans is argued to be using Des Esseintes' attempted creation of an artificial paradise as an allegory for his own engagement with Baudelairean Decadence; that he too is attempting to use Decadent aesthetics as an artificial paradise of aura and aesthetic time, adapting representations of the world into an authored text where meaning is located in pessimism and ornamented surfaces. This line of argument presents adaptation as the process that creates the adaptive product, this latter being the artificial paradise of existence in Decadence, which Huysmans works through in his *mise-en-abyme* narrative.

It is an escape from the present, from the “unbearable emptiness of the world” he found himself in (Donato, 2004: 3),<sup>102</sup> from embodied time, but it is one that lacks spiritual meaning, where the ornament of surface cloaks an ontological decay that sees Huysmans' asymptotic line curving away from Decadence towards literary and theological conversion in ‘spiritual naturalism’<sup>103</sup> and Catholicism. What we see allegorised in *À rebours* is Huysmans' revelation that Decadence as an aesthetic and an ontological perspective cannot redeem reality by adapting it into atemporal aestheticisation. This failure of the Decadent project is tragic for Des Esseintes, who lives it, but for Huysmans and his experiments in fiction, it is part of a self-adaptation necessary for the development of spiritual naturalism and his religious conversion.

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<sup>102</sup> Huysmans' *La Bievre* (1890) summarises his resistance to cultural changes such as Haussmannisation, and is made clear in his letter to Leclaire in 1900: “Best wishes for the health required to face this new century, which seems to me to open on to a porch beyond which stretches an endless avenue of abominations” (Baldick, 1955: 396).

<sup>103</sup> Spiritual naturalism was the literary style or genre developed by Huysmans through his middle novels, which became fully implemented after *Là-bas*. In *Là-bas* itself, the style is explained in the first chapter via a critical *ekphrasis* of Grünewald. Huysmans had seen this at Cassel in the summer of 1888 and produced the description which he was to place in the novel. The work made a huge impression on him, and he wrote to Destrée later that year that “the Primitives are art in its highest form, and supernatural realism is the only formula, the one true formula, which can exist for me” (cited in Baldick, 1955: 179). Baldick also refers to the style as ‘mystical Naturalism,’ whilst Huysmans was later to describe it in *Là-bas* as spiritual naturalism, saying: “It was necessary to keep the accurate documentation, the precision of detail, the rich and vigorous style of the realists, but it was also necessary to sink well-shafts into the soul, instead of trying to explain its every mystery by some malady of the senses. The novel [...] ought to be divided into two parts – that of the soul and that of the body – which would be welded together, or rather intermingled, as they are in life” (Huysmans, 2001: 6).

In the ideas of curation and aesthetic time, we read back and forth between the form and content of the novel, between Huysmans' use of versions of adaptation to create the *ekphrastic* representation of this Decadent experiment, and his *mise-en-abyme* dramatisations of this process in the character of Des Esseintes and his own adaptive project. This considers the adapter in relation to their historical and biographical context using a hermeneutics of allegorical analysis that does not completely rely on the close reading of language, but considers the themes and narrative of the text, as well as its intertextuality, using concepts from the liminal areas of Adaptation Studies. It considers a version of adaptation in the *fin de siècle*, utilising ideas of curation, aura, *mise-en-scène*, fragmentation, and collage to connect these practices to twentieth century adaptation and beyond, as well as considering their relationship to nineteenth-century ideas of Naturalism and Romanticism. The *fin de siècle* themes of addressing modernity and consumerism, cultural degeneration and entropy, are all central to the way that Decadence is thought of in relation to a purposeful engagement with concepts of adaptation, adding an examination of this historical moment to Adaptation Studies, and adding an adaptation perspective to Decadent studies.

### Chapter Summaries

CHAPTER TWO (Adaptation and Decadent Style) explores some shared traits between concepts of adaptation and descriptions of Decadent style. Setting these ideas in dialogue shows that structural resemblances exist between the creative process of adaptation, and a particular creative approach - labelled as Decadent style - of which *À rebours* is a key example. By noting shared traits, which are conceptualised using Decadent themes of ornamentation, dissolution, or an amalgam of the two, as well as considering the central Decadent trope of artifice as a particular relationship to a source 'text,' processes of adaptation are suggested to

be particularly conducive to thinking through creation within the aesthetic doctrines of Decadent style.

This hints at the potential for fragmentary versions of adaptation to be important formal contributors to the text's Decadent style, as well as models for the avenues of creative practice Huysmans has his character, Des Esseintes, undertake within the novel's narrative. By the same token, ideas of ornamentation and dissolution are noted as useful figurative terms for exploring versions or aspects of adaptation, just as the notion of the adaptive source text is destabilised, following an intertextual framework based in post-structuralist semiology.

CHAPTER THREE (Artifice: Adapting Nature) takes this latter idea on a step further. After defining the use of the important term 'Nature' (present as an appendix), Adaptation Studies 2.0's intertextual couching of adaptation is taken to its logical conclusion in the textualising of real-world stimuli and experiences, making adaptation a way to conceptualise representation within an intertextual framework. This is paralleled with, and used to analyse, the relationship to the source 'texts' of the outside world that is found in *À rebours*' Decadent creators. Huysmans as adapter is argued to be using the aesthetic theories of Baudelaire as an opposition to Naturalist approaches, in order to structure Decadent style on an engagement with the external world that deals primarily with it as a source constructed of prior representations, and/or textualised through reception as adaptation.

In addition, Des Esseintes' world is examined as a *mise-en-abyme* fictionalisation of Huysmans' own Decadent creativity, embedded in the creative undertakings of the avatar character. Both Huysmans and Des Esseintes are shown to create within a framework that can be conceptualised as adaptation, due to a characteristically Decadent desire to re-present works which have already represented an external world itself thought of (via Baudelaire's influence) as comprised of a multitude of natural stimuli made textual by the reception

process of each individual's perception. The ideas of Decadent style, which turns 'Nature' into authored artifice, are shown to be predicated on creative processes conforming to many ideas regarding adaptation. These are analysed for their significance to Huysmans in the writing of *À rebours*, in addition to their significance for the character whose world of unconventional texts and media is argued to depict a dramatisation of analogous Decadent creative processes to that of the author.

CHAPTER FOUR (Adapting Fragments: Collection and Curation) presents a structural model for the process of adaptation which is doubly presented by Huysmans in creating the novel, and a second time through the character of Des Esseintes within that novel. This structural model is that of the museum, where the Decadent work, adapting its multiple, fragmentary representations (including personal reception intertexts in the memory) of an external world considered as a mosaic of texts, is a curated collection. It adapts a collection of source texts, which have decayed an external 'Nature' into fragments, and curates these as a new-collection text of multiple fragments. This engages many of the border zones explored through Chapter One and builds on the explorations of Decadent creation and Nature as source, as well as the figures utilised in Chapters Two and Three.

The importance of collection in the Decadent aesthetic, and to Huysmans in particular as a way to distinguish himself from Zola's Naturalism, plus the significance of shifting concepts of collection in the *fin de siècle*, are analysed here as contributing to this model of the museum-text formed by curation. This model is posited as the dominant mode of adaptation in *À rebours'* Decadence - both for Huysmans as writer, and again by proxy via the undertakings of Des Esseintes, where the author has his character take Decadent adaptation into the freedom of new 'notional' forms. Additional contributing ideas presented in this chapter include: the importance of aura as a key to understanding the links between this particular model of adaptation and Decadent themes, and the similar ability of modes of

curation to embody mystical ideas in practical forms (via a Modernist teleology which contextualises Huysmans' Decadence). These draw Huysmans' biography and *fin de siècle* context into the novel's adaptive forms through the concept of aesthetic time, returning the argument to artifice and adaptation as deferrals of Nature's temporality.

CHAPTER FIVE (*Mise-en-scène* and *Ars memoria*) further examines the doubled form of the Decadent collection text as an adaptation, exploring the novel as an *ekphrasis* of a notional work: the house at Fontenay. The house depicted in the narrative, considered as Des Esseintes' project of Decadent adaptation, is broken down as a work of adaptation at varying levels. One of the most important layers of this text, one which collects smaller intertextual collages and intertexts, is the *mise-en-scène* of the house. This is analysed as a key Decadent collection text and a quintessentially Decadent creation, the product of the processes of adaptation analysed in the previous three chapters.

Delving into the narrative world, the chapter explores other processes that have contributed to the formation of the *mise-en-scène* text, as well as its structure. This has a particular focus on the role of memory in creating the artificial paradise of aesthetic time, where in the realist reading, the character collages fragmentary memory intertexts as part of the mosaic palimpsest of the adaptation of Nature he lives within. The creation of the *mise-en-scène* is posited as not only the Decadent adaptation of the fragmented sources of the external world, but simultaneously of a personal past in a practice that corresponds with the Classical idea of the *ars memoria*.

The character is read as having authored a doubled simulacrum of the world: both museum-like retreat and memory palace. The consequences of this are examined through a reading of the narrativisation of the character's experience of this text, positing through the link of *mise-en-abyme* and intentionality that the increasing suffocation felt by Des Esseintes within his 'adaptation' allegorises Huysmans' experience of Decadent aesthetics. This is

particularly the case when considering the significance of the Gothic and the theme of memory in the novel's narrative, which depicts the failure of the artificial paradise as an adaptation of Nature delivering the subject to aesthetic time.

In this chapter, the aims of the Decadent adaptation are examined, building on ideas of aura and mysticism in the previous chapter. The quintessential form of Decadent adaptation is proposed, where Des Esseintes' engagements with non-traditional texts and media utilise the same framework of process and source as that of the novel which represents them *ekphrastically* in literature, and which have been elucidated over the previous chapters. The relationship between Huysmans and his character as proxy who tests Decadent aesthetics is examined, and the Decadent adaptation is shown to fail in the allegory of the narrative.

CHAPTER SIX (Artifice and Decay in the Adaptations of *À rebours*) extends the dialogues between concepts of adaptation and key Huysmans/Decadent preoccupations of Nature and aesthetic time, considering in more depth the reasons for the inclusion of what are posited as versions, fragments, aspects, and echoes of adaptation in the Decadent aesthetics of *À rebours'* form and content. The idea of physical and textual bodies as key sites of thematic embedding and adaptive experimentation is unpacked here within the narrative of the uncanny turn from the previous chapter.

As the Decadent theme of decay is explored, *correspondences* are tracked between this idea and the curating adaptation that forms and is dramatised within the novel. Links between texts and bodies within a framework of degenerative entropy are examined for the way that adaptation becomes a way to signify structures of meaning that redeem Decadent surfaces. Adaptation and other forms of intertextuality are posited as necessary forms of purposeful collapse within the novel, where the Gothic suffocation of the character within his house of adaptation (explored in the previous chapter) is reflected in the formal



representation of his world in the novel, revealing the dissatisfaction of the author with the metaphysical aspect of Decadent aesthetics.

In addition to an exploration of analogies between adaptation and entropy, which explore through metaphor and association the generative decay of adaptation in a broader sense, the ideas of ornamentation and decay introduced in Chapter Two are returned to in order to summarise the role that adaptation plays in the novel, and to posit intentional reasons for this form and role for Huysmans. Adaptation is shown to be a structuring component of both the formation and collapse of Decadent aesthetics in *À rebours*, both in terms of the narrative world explored in the previous chapter, and the novel's intertextual form examined here.

Intertextual collapse across form and content is described as leading to a return of subjects to embodiment, to the external world, to biological time, and to Nature. This is contextualised within Huysmans' *oeuvre*, where *À rebours* as an experiment in Decadent aesthetics is shown to be an important staging post in Huysmans' development, an ornamentation and decay which develops his style as it reveals Decadence's ontological failure. Adaptation is read as - in the unconventional forms identified here - a contributing part of the asymptotic experiment with aesthetic time.

## 2. Adaptation and Decadent Style

### Chapter Introduction

This chapter begins the work of formulating a dialogue between selected concepts of adaptation and Decadence. This is done here in its broadest sense, before later chapters take more specific aspects of *À rebours*' Decadent aesthetics, and ideas derived from Adaptation Studies, and read them through each other. There, this is done to find the resemblances and inherencies that illustrate the argument that a portmanteau of versions of what we might term adaptation are an important part of *À rebours*' formal and thematic textures. Here, reading each through the other is done in a more general sense in order to establish the method, which is something like the inherency metaphor utilised by Elliott to describe adaptations, where here Decadence and adaptation might be thought of as two mirrors reflecting each other, though with a more extensive focus on how adaptation is found in Decadence.

In this chapter, reading tropes of adaptation and its study as reflected in Decadence and its scholarship, and vice versa, is not undertaken purely for its own sake and as an end in itself. Instead, it is a method employed to identify shared characteristics, which suggest a receptivity on the part of each to ideas from the other. To clarify: adaptation and Decadence will be shown to share some traits, to contain echoes of each other's concepts, indicating that versions or fragments of adaptation might have a significant place within a work of Decadent aesthetics, and at the same time, that Decadence might provide ways to conceptualise adaptation that are more organically receptive than being arbitrarily imposed.

Reading each in the other provides a glimpse into the shared characteristics that will be traced into specificities and argued for in terms of intentional inclusion, based on the ability of versions of adaptation to embody Decadent themes formally. The readings identify

structural similarities, which suggest that Decadent style's predilection for imitation and secondariness makes it receptive to theorising in terms of Adaptation Studies. This is explored by beginning to consider Chapter Three's theme: the ways in which Decadent creators such as Huysmans utilised Baudelaire's aesthetic theories to guide a creative approach to a natural world and a present moment. This reality<sup>104</sup> is viewed as a source text, which might be textually refined further by its re-presentation in other works, before the author's own interaction. It is clear how this notion might be theorised effectively by concepts from Adaptation Studies.

It is also suggested that due to the aforementioned shared structural aspects, some of the figurative language employed by theorists of Decadence - or some of the ways in which we might here employ figures derived from established Decadent themes - can not only illuminate aspects of Decadent creativity and form, but also be reflected back to aid in conceptualising certain aspects, tendencies, or versions of adaptation. This is done through the process-metaphors of dissolution, drawing on Bourget and contemporary cultural commentators; and ornamentation, which derives more directly from the style and content of *À rebours*. These metaphors for processes of creation in the Decadent style are explored as figures for approaches to adaptation, and indeed as ways in which we might consider a particular approach to adaptation as conforming to aesthetic ideals of Decadent style.

Adaptation is not only posited as a tool available to Decadent style due to its ability to conform to key creative themes, but Decadent style is also argued to be adaptive under this formulation, for its combining of the 'adaptive' processes of dissolution and ornamentation with regard to source 'intertexts' derived from other texts, or from the non-mediated (yet theoretically textualised) external world represented most symbolically by 'Nature.' These terms, and this re-framing of Decadent representation and creativity as arguably a version of adaptation, are expanded in the next chapter, with an emphasis on the 'source intertexts' and

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<sup>104</sup> See the Appendix and Chapter Two for an unpacking of the definitions and contexts for this term.

the nexus of 'Nature' which is adapted, and which is an important concept throughout the thesis.

This brief chapter attempts, then, to outline some of the ways in which Decadent style can be read as itself defined by structures of adaptation. Style is the aspect of Decadent texts that produces the echoes of the Decadent sensorium in the reader, stimulating imagination and synaesthetic intensity through its excess. Huysmans' "remarkable" style of "tortured sentences, strange images, monstrous epithets" (Baldick, 1955: 481-2) is at its most Decadent in *À rebours*, given free rein to pursue excess. Seen as "recognisable at twenty paces, even in English translations" (Hanson, 1994: 124), it was memorably described by Léon Bloy as "continually dragging Mother Image by the hair or the feet down the worm-eaten staircase of terrified syntax" (quoted in Baldick, 1955: 481) in a review of *À rebours* in 1884, and is the enduring aspect of Huysmans' work, the reason he is still read. Readers do not tend to take up Huysmans for narrative, or for character (though there are some memorable figures in his works), but for style.

Indeed, it could perhaps be posited that the archetypical Decadent style of prose is actually that of Huysmans: that any Decadent work which came after *À rebours* took on some degree of adaptive relationship to the novel's style. Praz suggested that the entirety of the Decadent canon is "contained in embryo in *À rebours*" (1933: 308), while Cevasco sees the novel as not only reflecting Decadent tastes but creating them (2001: 18),<sup>105</sup> and Reed considers "only the strain of fiction following from Huysmans [...] properly Decadent" (1985: 23). Whilst theorists are often referring to the novel as a repository of themes and tropes, this might also be extended to the stylistic tendencies of the work.

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<sup>105</sup> Des Esseintes' literary tastes for "Byzantine flowers of thought and deliquescent complexities of style" is a useful summary in Decadent style of the Decadent work which may be subsequently influenced by passages like this (Huysmans, 1956: 165).

Bloy's striking figure conjures that sense of Huysmans' style as populated by fragmented, self-contained spectacles of imagery, visual tableaux (most potently glimpsed in the *ekphrases*) connected by the sinuous sentences which pile adjectives upon each other in a suffocating closeness,<sup>106</sup> like Renard's description of Baudelaire's phrasing as "heavy," as if laden with "electrical fluids" (1964: 17). Huysmans' Decadent style in *À rebours* has that same quality of the magnetic storm, the prickling in the dense air that makes the excessive filigree of words oppressive. Joyce called the fervour of corruption in Huysmans' sad, angry pages a "blighted phosphorescence" (2000: 173), and there is a real sense when reading descriptions of Huysmans' style that the critic is prompted to wax lyrical in order to get anywhere near to conveying its effect, in what Ziegler terms a contagiousness of language (2009: 9).<sup>107</sup> In a Wildean shift from critic to artist, the writer attempts an adaptation of Huysmans in order to derive a bizarre and evocative enough figure to adequately summarise the style's heady vicissitudes, which intoxicate and exhaust the reader, for whom, like George Moore, a page of Huysmans is "as a dose of opium" (1886: 244).

Reed's work *Decadent Style* (1985) is key here in being one of the more extended examinations of this particular element, engaging with a transmedial Decadent style that is filtered through various forms into medium-specific versions of Decadent poetics.<sup>108</sup>

Decadent style might be seen as having distinct engagements with media forms, but actually creating similar forms and effects from these interactions, which suggest a more abstracted

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<sup>106</sup> The celebration of Moreau's painterly style as Huysmans interpreted it, and the remediation of this to literature, gives an example of how style frequently emerges in its most concentrated forms through interart dialogue: "never had the art of water-colour produced such brilliant hues; never before had an aquarellist's wretched chemical pigments been able to make paper sparkle so brightly with precious stones, shine so colourfully with sunlight filtered through stained glass windows, glitter so splendidly with sumptuous garments, glow so warmly with exquisite fleshtints" (Huysmans, 1956: 56). Sensory depth and the intense relationship between the reader or spectator and the work is key here.

<sup>107</sup> Barstad and Knutsen note that "it is easier to describe [Decadence] than to define it" (2016: xii), an idea that emerges in Gilman's *Decadence: The Strange Life of an Epithet* (1979). Denisoff identifies a collapse of meaning in the term (2001), as Luckhurst and Ledger do for the term degeneration in the *fin de siècle*, where it becomes an appellation denigrating all forms of difference, newness, and subversion (2000: 6).

<sup>108</sup> The idea of transmedia Decadence existing alongside or 'above' medium specificity is also noted by Murray and Hall (2013) and Barstad and Knutsen (2016).

conception of the style. Adaptation, as process and product, as thing-in-the-text and force guiding the text, allows a consideration of Decadent style as both transmedial and medium-specific.

Decadent style is primarily defined by ornamentation. Determining Decadent style as “inherently ornamental,” Schor identifies a pathology of the detail that might be described as “metastasis or hypertrophy or both” (2013: 47), building on the work of Jankelevitch, who also conceptualises the Decadent text as cancerous in its proliferations, yet paradoxically simultaneously sterile (1950: 339-340). The encrusting of the Decadent text with an overwrought, ornamental surface, constituted by details which have a dangerous potential for independence, is both obviously echoed in an image such as *À rebours*’ famous tortoise,<sup>109</sup> and also a clear relation of Paul Bourget’s “still unsurpassed” (Schor, 2013: 47) definition of Decadent style in 1881:

A Decadent style is one in which the unity of the book breaks down to make room for the independence of the page, in which the page breaks down to make room for the independence of the sentence, and the sentence to make room for the independence of the word (tr. in Constable, Denisoff, & Potolsky, 1999: 16).

This formulation suggests the independence of detail found in Huysmans’ writing, where syntax is wrestled into stricken forms in order to accommodate the excessive procession of words, where images bloat or contract at the expense of narrative progression. The part’s dominance over the whole, the cult of the detail, is the foundational principle of the

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<sup>109</sup> The tortoise’s ‘adaptation’ is a result of Des Esseintes’ desire to place a moving object onto an Oriental carpet in order to set off its colours more effectively. First thinking that a dull object would create an evocative contrast, he then finds that “the raw Sienna hue of the shell dimmed the sheen of the carpet,” and so decides to gild the tortoise into a brilliance that will dominate the garish surroundings: “Des Esseintes accordingly decided to have his tortoise’s buckler glazed with gold,” becoming akin to “a Visigothic shield tegulated with shining scales.” Still considering the work incomplete, the character then decides to encrust the shell with precious stones.

ornamentalism of Decadent style, structuring its artificial form, which in turn begets the thematic tropes that bear out the resemblance. This mereological relationship also influences the adaptations undertaken which form, and are allegorised within, *À rebours*. The relationships between sustained and fragmentary adaptations, as well as the novel's largely exposed intertextual mosaic, are a key part of its approach to adaptation, and rely on part/whole dynamics of fragmentation.

Decadent style's excessive artificing is an exaltation of "human ordering," which progresses "to such a degree that often no natural referent remains for their designs" (Reed, 1985: 9)<sup>110</sup> - a far cry from Romanticism and Naturalism, and a set of formal strategies which mirror the flight to artifice described in the narrative of *Des Esseintes*. As with the tortoise, which embodies the ornamented form of the Decadent text, the organic and the external exist "only as a function of style" (Hanson, 1994: 122), killed into art (1994: 123). The figure from *Des Esseintes*' house also recalls the paradox of inertia and proliferation in Decadent style's ornamentation, where, even as narrative grinds to a halt and the organic decomposes under the weight of detail (North, 1999: 88), the reflections between the gems on the surface find new hues in fleeting, illusory generation.

Bourget, a novelist and conservative cultural critic, formulated his conception of Decadent style's "chaos of insubordination" (Constable, Potolsky, Denisoff, 1999: 16) through a critical adaptation, building on Désiré Nisard's comments from his work on the Latin Decadence, which drew parallels between the part/whole relationship in works formed under the fall of Rome and those of contemporary practice. Bourget clarified both the figure and the link by applying it to Baudelaire's work in 'Essai de psychologie contemporaine: Charles Baudelaire' (1881), and this became the "dominant analogy" (Murray and Hall, 2013: 3) for

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<sup>110</sup> The term 'natural referent' utilised here by Reed will be examined further in the next chapter in relation to concepts of reality and Nature, evoking as it does the notion of unmediated source texts derived from nature, and the need for the Decadent work to transubstantiate these forms.

Decadent style, incorporating other definitions of Baudelaire's work, such as Gautier's famous lyrical passage in the 'Preface' to the 1868 edition of *Les Fleurs du Mal*.<sup>111</sup>

Gautier's description sought to drain some of the moral prejudice from the definitions, recalling Havelock Ellis' comments on the arbitrariness of such judgments: that "we are not called upon to air our moral indignation over the bass end of the musical clef" (1931), and seeing beauty in both style and subject matter, whilst agreeing on the architecture suggested by Nisard. Nietzsche subsequently appropriated Bourget's definition for the 1888 *Ecce Homo* (2007), though he challenged its method of searching the text for traces of sickness, instead noting, as Baudelaire had in 'Au Lecteur' (1857), that this symptomatology is itself symptomatic.<sup>112</sup> In these discussions, the readings, critical perspectives, and moral judgments - the structures of meaning around the texts - are mutable and unstable, yet what remains constant is the figure that describes the form. Like adaptations, Decadent style is frequently best conceptualised through image and metaphor.

In returning to that connection between Bourget's encapsulation of Decadent style, and the way that it appears on the surface of Huysmans' text as the suffocating cult of artificial detail, it can be seen that the artifice of form and the central theme are conflated in *À rebours*. The novel presents an excessive, heightened version<sup>113</sup> of the literary style Huysmans had already developed in his Naturalist works, with its dense and overwhelming descriptions,<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> In *À rebours*, though, Gautier is actually criticised for being "a marvellous reflector," confining himself to "sending back the image of his surroundings with impersonal precision" (Huysmans, 1956: 174), an interesting contrast to the way that Naturalism might be thought of as reflective.

<sup>112</sup> For a full examination of the relationships between Baudelaire, Nietzsche, and definitions of Decadence in relation to Bourget and Nisard, see Constable, Potolsky, and Denisoff's 'Introduction' to *Perennial Decay* (1999).

<sup>113</sup> Baldick's 'Note' on the 1956 translation describes it as: "one of the strangest literary idioms in existence, packed with purple passages, intricate sentences, weird metaphors, unexpected tense changes and a vocabulary rich in slang and technical terms [...] the resultant mixture, like the French original, is best taken in small doses."

<sup>114</sup> Where "the gas lamps were flickering in the fog, each surrounded by its dirty yellow halo, while strings of lights seemed to be swimming in the puddles and circling the wheels of the carriages that jogged along through a sea of filthy liquid fire." Across the page, a row of books are coloured "butcher's-blue or cabbage-green and decorated along the seams with gold and silver flowers, as well as others covered in cloth dyed nut-brown, leek-green, lemon-yellow or currant-red, and stamped with black lines on the back and sides" (Huysmans, 1956: 120-1).



often themselves created via an adaptation of another media form, in the preoccupation with *ekphrastic* transposition.<sup>115</sup> Particularly in *À rebours*, but also arguably in early Naturalist works,<sup>116</sup> style for Huysmans was a route to artifice, with the latter as itself the principle of art, the method for the transmutation of the present, and the sign of authorial agency. In *À rebours*, style subsumes subject matter, becoming subject. The book describes the ornamentations of a character's reality, the stylisation of the world,<sup>117</sup> based on the same cult of detail and ornamentation found in the prose. Huysmans adapts the sources of the world into style as Des Esseintes adapts it into the architext of his artificial retreat.

Whilst ornamentation is a prevalent term for summarising the defining characteristic of Decadent style, in fact, there is perhaps an even more common figure for its form and function: one more clearly present in Bourget's summation, and one more etymologically linked to the epithet. This would be that of decay or degeneration, the fragmentation into detail from a whole that is the negative of ornamentation, which builds a source up into a mass of detail. The doubled form of Decadent style is conveyed in these most common figures of ornamentation and dissolution; the more specific and active forms of decay and artifice, the primary themes of the novel,<sup>118</sup> mirrored in the style.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> e.g. the *ekphrastic* gallery which is Chapter Five of *À rebours*, with its hallucinatory progression from Moreau's feverish Salomes, through Luyken's tortures, Bresdin as an opioid Dürer, Redon's mysteries, before finishing on El Greco's framed Christ.

<sup>116</sup> For both Ziegler and King (2004: 39 & 2004: 11), the artificial style of early works such as *Marthe* in 1876 (1957) actually problematises the easy categorisation of Huysmans' early career as Naturalistic.

<sup>117</sup> In another example: "the plain, lying partly in the shadow of the hills, appeared to have shrunk in size; and in the middle it seemed as if it were sprinkled with face-powder and smeared with coldcream. In the warm breeze that fanned the colourless grass and scented the air with cheap spicy perfumes, the moon-bleached trees rustled their pale foliage and with their trunks drew a shadow-pattern of black stripes on the white-washed earth, littered with pebbles that glinted like fragments of broken crockery" (Huysmans, 1956: 24).

<sup>118</sup> Dominant Decadent themes noted by Carter, Bernheimer, de Palacio, and many others.

<sup>119</sup> Huysmans might be seen to be describing his own style in relation to modern French and the *fin de siècle* via its analogical link to the Decadence of Rome, using a typically corporeal set of metaphorical devices defined by "deliquescence": "that special gamey flavour which in the fourth century – and even more in the following centuries – the odour of Christianity was to give to the pagan tongue as it decomposed like venison, dropping to pieces at the same time at the civilisation of the Ancient World" (Huysmans, 1956: 33). In a later chapter he utilises this metaphor to connect modern French writers to these Latin Decadents.

The embodiment of these two extremes in both the stylistics and thematics of *À rebours* as a Decadent work is a conjunction recalling Joyce's phrase, and suggests a paradoxical dual motion of breaking down and building up. It recalls and is encapsulated in the images of the *Katakombenheiligen*, the gem-encrusted skeletons of Medieval saints; an overblown artificial beauty encasing a morbid yet natural bodily rot; an ornamented decay. The way in which Decadent style builds up its forms through an ornamentation of source material<sup>120</sup> denaturalises the external world for both reader and character. As noted by Bernheimer, it makes textuality into intertextuality and the world into a catalogue (1989: 264). It is ideally an ornamentation of an already artificial, previously ornamented source, to increase the artifice. Huysmans' novel is itself not directly a stylisation of the world, but an extended *ekphrasis* of a text which has ornamented itself out of nature: Des Esseintes' house.

Depending on the critical position of the observer, Decadent style might be seen as an ornamentation of the neutral or even degenerate source into art (Des Esseintes' position), or the dissolution of a sacred source into a degenerate form (Nordau's view).<sup>121</sup> The direction taken on the vertical axis merely depends upon the attitude taken towards that source. Indeed, the work of Constable, Potolsky, and Denisoff has done much to show the nature of Decadent art as a 'two-way mirror,' where the critic's own reflection creates a distortion in the analysis of the text/symptom metaphor used to summarise the stylistic approach (1999: 17). The part/whole metaphors previously discussed from Bourget's definition are consequently "both suggestive and misleading," playing into a "narrative of decline" in such a way that the "energetic and creative" challenge to modern excess is obscured (Murray and Hall, 2013: 4).

However, what is most interesting here for the current discussions is that both of these modes of creation within Decadent style are based in a deviation, a secondariness, as are

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<sup>120</sup> Reed's 'natural referents' (1985: 9).

<sup>121</sup> Nordau's infamous book *Degeneration* (1892) was a compilation of the symptoms of devolution in the *fin de siècle*, of which Decadence in literature was a key component.

other Decadent themes or associations: perversion, excess, intoxication, inversion. The concept is revealed in the very etymology of ‘Decadence,’ which, through the Latin *cadere*; ‘to fall,’ and de- ‘down’ or ‘apart,’ suggests a “falling away” (Reed, 1985: 10; Stableford, 1998: 6) from some established norm, an elaboration of an existing tradition, a dissolution creating instability in an extant form, linking back to Bourget’s figure. Decadent style is defined only in its “relation to a classic style” (Ellis, 1931), an inversion of the Classical mereological relationship between the parts and the whole, and one usually seen as the bad and febrile other of a stronger movement (Constable, Potolsky, Denisoff, 1999: 8).

In sharing the concept of secondariness,<sup>122</sup> a dialogue is formed between concepts of Decadence and adaptation<sup>123</sup> which suggests that adaptation may have been a mode of creation which embodied aspects of Decadent poetics more effectively than others. For adaptation, this also provides a historical example of the denigration of secondary practice, where for Nordau and critics of Decadence such as Smith,<sup>124</sup> who described Decadence as the “non-creative imitation of a preceding and superior literary expression [namely Romanticism]” (1953: 651), derivation equals degeneration.<sup>125</sup> Here we see a version of the perspective that underpins fidelity discussions among audiences of adaptations (where a source is favoured).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Whilst acknowledging that not all which is secondary is an adaptation.

<sup>123</sup> In addition to a shared conceptualisation via figuration.

<sup>124</sup> Constable, Potolsky, and Denisoff (1999) also use Smith as an example of the interpretation of Decadence as a febrile otherness, despite the fact that he is not a dominant voice in Decadent theory. Instead he evokes something of the common critical view of Decadent collection and imitation from outside of the field, and is a scholarly descendant of Nordau. Critics such as David Weir (1996) and recently Murray and Hall (2013) have done much to show that Decadent resignification is not a symptom of decline but a recycling necessary for innovation.

<sup>125</sup> This feeds into a decline motif in *fin de siècle* France that sees devolution gaining the upper hand over evolution. For a discussion of this see Chapter Six. Orban (2016) has examined this via the French collective conscience, looking back on the grandeur of the past.

<sup>126</sup> In contrast to Hutcheon’s discussions of Ancient Greek attitudes to adaptation, where it is the norm (2006: 20).

In fact, the Decadence of *À rebours* rejects fidelity. It takes pleasure in mimesis, but only when set off by alteration and acknowledgement.<sup>127</sup> Instead, the style's relationships to prior forms can be argued to be based on a version of adaptation; adaptations via artificial ornamenting and decaying processes which elaborate the source into a new, distorted version. Decadent style, then, through shared characteristics of secondariness, might be responsive to analyses which focus on the process of adaptation. Adaptation Studies can therefore be another route into thinking about the process of Decadent creation, and the form of works in the Decadent style.

Decadent style is parasitic<sup>128</sup> and “transformational,” requiring a “host” (Reed, 1985: 10) in order to enact its ornamentations and decay. In the fragmentation of sources via ornamentation and decay,<sup>129</sup> Decadent style often turns existing forms back against themselves, undermining their ‘truths’ and exposing their illusory nature in the distorted mirror of the adaptation. The dissolution noted by Reed (1985: 10), and the excess that adorns, are the actions of decay and ornamentation, part of the artificial, authored process. In order for artifice to be perceived, it requires an active reception relying on acknowledgement. For Huysmans, the exposed intertextuality and over-stylisation of Decadent aesthetics in *À rebours* reveals the artifice of form and the re-presentation of representations, showing a world first decayed by interpretation into the artifice of representation, before being ornamented by re-combination and the adding of new elements.

Decadent style is consequently prompting a sense of recall based on prior knowledge in the reader, a reading through the palimpsest's layers. The way that this might be used to

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<sup>127</sup> For example the discussions of artificial flowers (1956: 83), a reveling in mimicry that requires knowledge of process. This appears to be a love of fidelity adaptation, but it is still a love of difference and material change, and for the adaptation in itself. Absolute fidelity, or repetition, is not desired, but merely adaptation with a high degree of proximity.

<sup>128</sup> Another term which requires emptying of its value weighting when applied to aesthetics.

<sup>129</sup> Both of these terms referring to a particulate quality, where ornamentation builds up, adding adorning fragments whilst decay breaks the extant down into a fragmented form.

destabilise the 'Classical' or established might be read in the parodying of consumerism in *À rebours*, or within the narrative world as Des Esseintes' domestication of nature, or his objectifying of Catholicism. It is indicated on a formal level in terms of Huysmans' appropriative relationships to other literary styles; to Naturalism, to Romanticism, and the way that these extant forms are perverted by the inward turn of Decadence, rather than the way these two forms confront the external.<sup>130</sup>

In this sense, Decadent style does not only utilise adaptation, but is actually inherently adaptive. Creation within the Decadent mode is always an adaptation, always a "heresy within the faith" (Reed, 1985: 10), a manifested weariness with the established order (Ellis, 1931). An existing form is decayed, rearranged, edited, compressed,<sup>131</sup> or expanded to engender a self-conscious and artificial version of its previous existence, fragmented into parody. Decadent works of art are built on frameworks of previously extant forms, often even artifice upon artifice, adapting from adaptations or previous mediations to highlight their rejection of the external world (style mirroring characters), Reed's idea of the 'natural referent.'

Artifice is therefore an adaptation of the 'natural,' conscious and acknowledged, and its centrality to Decadent style points up the aesthetic formulation of Decadence as a "highly self-conscious dissolution of established form for the purpose of creating a subtler, pervasive, and cerebral form" (Reed, 1985: 10). In Reed's terms, Decadence can be read as both a particular style of adaptation (the decay and ornamentation of a source), and the result of that style, just

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<sup>130</sup> See Wasserman (1964) for an interesting investigation of the way in which Romanticism's external/internal dialectic can be examined epistemologically. What is consistent, though, is the desire to confront whichever forms of vast externality could be found. Zola's 'manifesto' is revealing for conveying the Naturalist viewpoint, which he defined as "the return to nature and to man, direct observation, correct anatomy, the acceptance and the depiction of that which *is*" (quoted in Esslin, 1968: 69). Borghart sees typical Naturalist subject matter being contemporary society and a unified reality (2007: 222), whilst Griffiths describes how Zola privileges the visual due to a desire to make the reader "see reality" (2013: 22).

<sup>131</sup> As in the "*osmazome* of literature" which is the artistic ideal for Des Esseintes, a novel composed in the mind and then transmuted "by an alchemist of genius" into a "few concentrated sentences," "the essential oil of art" which is accessible only via an "intellectual communion between a hieratic writer and an ideal reader" (Huysmans, 1956: 183). It requires the formation in the mind of an intermediate or pre-instantiated work, and a representation which is more of a compressing adaptation, requiring archaeological palimpsestuous reading that is able to reconstruct the whole from the fragmentary part.

as for Hutcheon adaptation is both process and product (2006: 7). Adaptation here is clearly arguable, as it tends to require a text as a form. The textuality of reality in Decadent perspectives is unpacked in the next chapter, so here adaptation is suggested as a mode not absolutely, but analogically: Decadent artifice distorts an extant form, and therefore shares characteristics with adaptations which might suggest further examination of these structural similarities.

Huysmans' stylistic approach in *À rebours* bears out the adaptive nature of Decadent style, appropriating other forms at various levels in the text, frequently through intertextuality. Whilst this might be suggested to be the 'most adaptive' of Huysmans' works due to its concentrated Decadent style, Ziegler actually sees Huysmans' work from its earliest incarnations negotiating an anxiety of influence, a problem of "acknowledging the authority of his sources, while appropriating and adapting them to his own literary art" (2004: 11).<sup>132</sup> According to Ziegler, Huysmans' style itself is inherently concerned with adaptation, seeking a mode of originality through ways of transfiguring source material, where style becomes the way to find creative individuality, the wilful infidelity in the adaptive relationships. Self-adaptation via stylistic progression is negotiated through intertextual and adaptive collage. Therefore when Huysmans' already adaptive style is at its most Decadent - itself a style concerned with transmuting extant forms – concepts of Adaptation Studies might become a useful way to interrogate aspects of the text's intertextuality.

If one of the characteristics of Decadent style is its adaptive quality, which both ornaments and fragments sources, adaptation can also be seen as itself fragmenting further within Decadent style, to become a technique for embedding ideas of artifice and decay within the novel. Beneath the macro process of the adaptation of an existing literary framework identified by Reed - the defining idea of inversion in Decadent style (present in the title of *À*

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<sup>132</sup> Griffiths has focused on the way that many nineteenth-century authors utilise self-conscious borrowings from multiple sources, the dramatisation of their own acts of adaptation, and the playful acknowledgement of their own points of origin, as ways to "paradoxically" establish literary originality (2013: 8).

*rebours*) - which progresses down the doubled track of ornamentation and dissolution, *À rebours* is also filled with other acknowledged intertexts.<sup>133</sup> Including the adaptations, these provide the self-referentiality needed for the adaptive artifice that defines Decadent style.

These intertexts are versions of other works present in both the diegesis as objects in Des Esseintes' house, and the intertextual surface of the novel as listed citations, creating the cult of details, ornamenting the text with a collection of other texts. This collection might be considered a textualised whole in its status as a collage representation of the contemporary world outside the retreat and the novel. This arranged and reflexively exposed intertextual layer is the fragmented source for adaptation forming the skeleton of the novel. The reader is prompted to oscillate back and forth between it and the narrative diegesis in acknowledged artifice and adaptation. Huysmans has decayed the world into representational intertexts, which as a collection, a single text, have been adapted to form the novel, where the intertextuality is acknowledged by objectifying the texts in the narrative as the collection that is the character's architext.<sup>134</sup> It is this primary adaptation of a collection which forms the artifice of the novel's Decadent style, and which can be conceptualised as an acknowledged ornamentation and decay. This is doubled by its *mise-en-abyme* dramatisation, where Des Esseintes does the same. Contained within this overarching adaptation of a segment of the intertextual layer of the novel are other adaptations.

The tendency of these adaptations to highlight textuality seems almost to anticipate aspects of postmodernist techniques, and indeed, Zurbrugg has examined the "surprising similarities" (1999: 218) between Huysmans and Baudrillard, between the Decadent philosophies of the 1890s and 1990s.<sup>135</sup> It would not be inconceivable to see these resonances

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<sup>133</sup> Like Leitch's embedded microtexts (2007: 121).

<sup>134</sup> For Des Esseintes picks up the books of the intertextual layer and stands in front of the paintings which feature as *ekphrases*.

<sup>135</sup> Recalling Durtal's comment in *Là-bas* that "the tail-ends of the centuries all resemble each other" (Huysmans, 2001: 219).

in aesthetic strategies as well as cultural perspectives. In this sense, adaptation becomes a method of artificing, in the macro perspective of refuting the natural, the external, the present, by re-presenting (ornamenting) representations (fragments of a decayed external world), enacting the ‘heresy within the faith,’ which is Decadent style’s engagement with the organic and the contemporary.

It also structures the way in which a multitude of intertextual ‘parts’<sup>136</sup> foreground the surface of the text; ornamenting it with their decay, for each is only a fragmentary version of its original form. Adaptation might itself be metaphorically conceptualised as a mode of artificialisation (elaborating an extant form into a secondary version reliant on the first), and a mode of decaying (as process, it is an energy creatively breaking down that text, and as reception, its dialogism continues this fragmentation): two of the key vectors of the way in which Decadent style organises itself as proceeding from an existing form, and building up its own artificial form.

*À rebours*, then, is constructed in a Decadent style which can be read as being defined by adaptation, whilst also utilising clearer, self-contained adaptations within the novel to further build up the threads of ornamentation and dissolution, artifice and decay, which are the characteristic aspects of this style. Forms of adaptation structure Huysmans’ text, foregrounding the encrusted surface, whilst revealing its decayed organic unity through acknowledgement that induces a reception which activates the palimpsestuous qualities needed for both artifice and adaptation, where the former is – in this reading of the novel’s intertextuality – a version of the latter.

Another facet of Decadent style’s adaptive nature is suggested here, which is to do with its reception, and the breakdown of meaning which might be seen to be induced by fragmentations of decay. Adaptation in *À rebours* defines and is defined by the mereological figure of Decadent style, with its “fetishistic pleasure of the symbolic fragment” which is, for

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<sup>136</sup> Fragments within the collage source-text.



Huysmans, a signatory aspect of style (Hanson, 1994: 123). *À rebours* has been read as exemplifying Decadent style's "movement from narrative unity to syntactical dissolution" (Murray and Hall, 2013: 3) that chaos of insubordination as the parts refuse to be subsumed. This is opposed to a work such as *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), which has thematic or narrative ambiguity, but not grammatical Decadence. The latter's stylistic Decadence, for Murray and Hall (2013: 3), is found only in the pages of excessive catalogues; therefore it is only in the fragmentary adaptations of *À rebours* that the work attains the mantle of Decadent style.

In the foregrounding of the textual surface which is created by the adaptation of a section of intertextual sources as a single objectified collection, the ornamental nature of the Decadent text, and its concomitant decay, its grammatical Decadence which is a textual experience of "hysterical fragmentation" (Hanson, 1994: 166), actually embeds a further layer of meaning within the formal structures of Decadent style. The escalating artifice brought about through the decaying away of the external world through adapted representations, texts of texts, like *Salomé*, creates a sense of decaying meaning, destabilising reception.<sup>137</sup> The acknowledged artifice and repetitions created by the inclusion of other texts are an important part of what Halpern sees as the implication of the reader in the unresolved anticipation of the self-frustrating Decadent text, circling around an empty centre in a mechanical repetition of desire (1978: 93).

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<sup>137</sup> Fragments of source versions from the *Salomé* chain remain in the novel, where within the *ekphrasis* of Moreau's work, Huysmans quotes a section of lines from the Gospel of St. Matthew. Huysmans also has Des Esseintes note the adaptive chain and its ornamentations of these decayed and recontextualised fragments by commenting that in conception, Moreau's work "went far beyond the data supplied by the New Testament" (1956: 52). This is an elaboration transposed in *ekphrasis* along with the collected fragments of one of its key sources, in addition to further intertexts drawn out of the chain or added in its recontextualisation, for she is described as wearing "a nondescript diadem like *Salammbô*," drawing in Flaubert intertextually (1956: 53).

Halpern sees *À rebours* as having been written against itself; its subject matter is its own style, and its style is an artifice expressed in the idiom of truth<sup>138</sup> (ornamented Naturalism), a technique which devalues meaning. Adaptation contributes to this as one of the key ways in which the text is ornamented and yet decayed; decayed in terms of unity, to give the sense of unresolved anticipation, and decayed in the sense of its inability to express any external, stable world, for it can only speak of other works. Its artifice and its relation to other works - both key elements of its Decadent style based in adaptation - mean that it decays beneath the weight of the over-ornamentation, the textualities which reflect back and forth the unreliability of textuality itself. The reader begins to be drawn into the ontology of the dweller in artifice, to Des Esseintes' experience in the narrative, via the excess of artificial ornament and its attached decay of meaning. In a work that is an adaptation of a collage of other works, the artifice of its acknowledgment, where Decadent style writes only of Decadent style, accomplishes this. Adaptations and other intertextual citations form a contributing aspect in their own right, their repetitions across textual boundaries mirroring that deferment of desire noted by Halpern, in the "interminable regression of parodic repetition" (Halpern, 1978: 100-101), lost in the distance from objectivity.

In *À rebours*' Decadent style, there is a strong link between formal strategies such as adaptation, the novel's Decadent themes, and the ontology of Decadent characters. Reed sees Decadent style as "self-consciously [using] stylistic strategies to embody the meanings conveyed in the subjects and materials of its art" (1985: 9), and adaptation - which this chapter contends is an inherent part of Decadent style - is a formalist textual function which is partially responsible for revealing the Decadent ontology in *À rebours*.

It is a part of the ornamentation that is an overburdening of texts and stylistic elements, which pushes the work far from a world already decayed into fragmented

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<sup>138</sup> This phrase is Reed's, who agrees with Halpern (1985: 36). It also echoes Hillis-Miller's idea that intertextuality in the realist novel is a "ghost effect," intruding uncannily into the mimetic narrative texture to destabilise (2005: 146).

intertextuality and adapted as a single source to form the narrative.<sup>139</sup> In this, style itself reveals the absence beneath the glimmer of the ornamented intertextual surfaces. The fragmented world is a text(s) of texts, a chain of increasing artificiality that, with each version, moves further from the mythic 'original' source. As with the excessive, sinuous syntax and rare lexicons of Huysmans' inventory style (Cressot, 1938), the novel as an adaptation of the intertextual collection as a text also creates a self-conscious deferral of the natural, the original, the present. The decay of this source remains in the accumulated fragments of inventory ornamentation, acknowledging the artifice of the adaptation and rendering the text empty in terms of its ability to speak about a shared ontological experience disentangled from representation.

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the ways in which Huysmans and other Decadent creators adapt the world and other source texts as a series of fragments, utilising processes that might be thought of as decay and ornamentation. These produce a stylised artificial representation, where in Decadent approaches artifice might be thought of as structurally similar to an adaptation. Many of the ideas that are followed into more specific and in-depth routes throughout the chapters of this thesis are introduced here, setting up connections and concepts that will be explored more extensively in relation to the larger argument.

The chapter has begun the thesis' central method of productively opposing and setting in dialogue select concepts from Decadence and Adaptation Studies. In so doing, it has provided evidence that this method does more than arbitrarily read one concept in terms of another, but arrives at useful resemblances, echoes, and shared traits: a conceptual inherency found through analogical reading. However, the method is not concerned with merely

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<sup>139</sup> According to Dicecco, adaptations are always active engagements with remains (2017: 620).

observing these twinned characteristics. In noting shared structural aspects of Decadence and adaptation, reasons have been posited for these inherencies, and conclusions drawn regarding the inclusion of adaptive strategies in Decadent works due to their ability to embody or recall Decadent tropes, stylistic results, and creative processes.

These ideas were arrived at through the reading of key metaphors for describing Decadent style - dissolution and ornamentation, or their combination - as ways to describe processes of adaptation; in addition to the idea that Decadent style carries a version of adaptation in its capacities for imitation and its secondary status. Through considering dissolution/ornamentation as a metaphorical amalgam that describes a version of adaptation corresponding to the ideals of Decadent style, a particularly 'Decadent' version of adaptation is suggested: if Decadent style might be considered as being in some way adaptive, then adaptation might, in a particular version or instance, be considered Decadent.

This sets up the exploration of *À rebours*' portmanteau of Decadent adaptations throughout the thesis, introducing key tropes including fragmentation, decay, and artifice. The setting in dialogue of concepts here has generated a figurative conceptualisation of adaptation in the Decadent style which is utilised to analyse the presence of adaptation in its many fragmentary and arguable forms in *À rebours*, as well as theorising the reasons for its intentional yet non-explicit inclusion. This proposes new figures for aspects of the adaptation process, in addition to exploring some of the border zones between Adaptation Studies and literary approaches. It also identifies a conceptual framework for analysing the process and products that constitute the secondariness of Decadent aesthetics.

The dialogues between adaptation and Decadence introduced here also foreground the ways in which the examinations of adaptation in Decadence suggest further routes for Adaptation Studies under its own aegis. In analysing Decadent style as inherently adaptive, a call is put out for further research into the adaptive quality of certain formal styles in various media, the reasons for this, and the receptiveness (and ability to make contributions) of such

investigations to adaptation scholarship. Similarly, the metaphors of ornamentation, dissolution, and their amalgam, are suggested as new figures for the conceptualisation of aspects of adaptation as process. This is particularly the case when thinking about the intention of the adapter with regard to their source intertext(s), and encourages further investigation of case studies which might test the efficacy of these metaphors outside of Decadent works, as well as illustrating and adding detail to their formulation.

In addition to this, the chapter has responded to Leitch's request for more scholarship to address and destabilise the notion of a source intertext in processes of adaptation. In examining the Decadent idea of the contemporary experience (or 'Nature') as a textualised source which requires fragmentation and re-presentation before adaptation, a new way to think about not only the adapter's relationship to a source, but also how we might define and delineate the source of an adaptation has been explored and tested. This is pursued to a deeper level in the following chapter.

### 3. Artifice: Adapting Nature

#### Chapter Introduction

This chapter explores a key concept for the thesis in its characterisation of the primary version of adaptation that holds together the more fragmentary instances in *À rebours*. This is examined in the case of Huysmans' novelistic processes of creation, and in the second case at hand, the projects undertaken by the character of Des Esseintes within the novel's narrative. This extends the idea of the novel as asymptotic experiment, where Des Esseintes' project within the bounds of the narrative allegorises - via *mise-en-abyme* - the Decadent aesthetic within which the author has immersed himself in order to create this novel. More specifically, the novel is paralleled with the distinct 'work' which is Des Esseintes' retreat at Fontenay, the house which is an artificial paradise out of the world.

The relationship to Huysmans' project is not direct reflection, but one of refraction. Des Esseintes' re-presentation of the world in the authored architext is a Decadent creative project akin to Huysmans' creation of the novel; however, Huysmans has his character live within his creation. In this sense he is the canary that Huysmans sends into Decadent aesthetics through this work, and the work, which is at the same time the account of the experiment, becomes a way to test the ontological status of a subject immersed within Decadent aesthetics. As Huysmans explores the ability of Decadence to carve a meaningful existence for the subject bulwarked against the present, Des Esseintes lives his own version of the experiment, minus the author's detachment. In this chapter, both of the Decadent works analysed - Huysmans' novel and Des Esseintes' house - are analysed as versions of adaptation in the Decadent style.

In this sense, they are dissolution/ornamentations, or decayed artifices, of the external world. This latter term is somewhat unrepresentative and requires qualification here;

however, prior to this, it is worth noting that here we are examining the status or character of the source intertext of an adaptation. This is the case particularly for an adaptation in the Decadent style. However, it also extends the previously mentioned work by Leitch, in destabilising some of the conceptualisations of the source text in many approaches to adaptation theory. Similarly, it applies the intertextual framework for adaptation so favoured by the second wave in a more extended sense, testing its validity and boundaries.

In *À rebours*, art is only to be found in artifice; nature “has had her day” (Huysmans, 1956: 22) and must be reworked, improved, corrected. This correction is a transmutation of the “platitudinous limitations” (1956: 22) of Nature,<sup>140</sup> an alchemical distillation into the art of artifice, following Nietzsche’s dictum that “no artist tolerates reality” (1909: 74).<sup>141</sup> The transmutation of Nature is allegorised in the novel’s content, a *mise-en-abyme* of the form described as an adaptation in the previous chapter. It is the adaptation of its raw materials into style, into an ornamented and ordered version, reflexively signifying its authorial mediation (artifice = affective authorship in *À rebours*) and becoming art through artifice. Therefore, the artificing of Nature that is described in the narrative, the formal stylisation of its materials, might be read as an intermedial adaptation.

The argument against this would propose that ‘adapting Nature’ is merely representation. The claim here is certainly not an attempt to displace this, but follows ideas such as Hutcheon’s analyses of videogames and reality TV as adapting a textualised reality, an invoked precursor text (2006: 62/143). Adaptation theory might be seen as a different route into analysing the mediating process that in some cases is particularly relevant. For Huysmans as author of a Decadent novel, adapting a collected source text constituted by

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<sup>140</sup> See Appendix.

<sup>141</sup> For *Des Esseintes*, there is “no moonlit forest of Fontainebleau that cannot be reproduced by stage scenery under floodlighting; no cascade that cannot be imitated to perfection by hydraulic engineering; no rock that *papier-mâché* cannot counterfeit; no flower that carefully chosen taffeta and delicately coloured paper cannot match!” (Huysmans, 1956: 23).

fragmentary representations of Nature, as well as for Des Esseintes as proxy proponent of Decadent aesthetic theory and ‘author’ of a Decadent retreat, Nature and its organic ornamentations are texts to be represented and adapted (decayed and ornamented) in order to constitute stylised artifice. In the setting out of *À rebours*’ aesthetic of artifice early in the novel, Huysmans describes nature’s “inventions,” “creations,” and “works” (1956: 23). Even prior to *À rebours* in the *Tableaux Parisiens* of 1880 we find a similar view of the texts of Nature which require adaptation, an artifying into true art:

Created incomplete, in anticipation of the role that man will assign to her, nature looks to her master for his final, finishing touches [...]  
we have delegated engineers to match nature to our needs, to adapt her to our soft and pitiful lives which it’s her job to frame and reflect.  
(Huysmans, 2004: 106-7)

Nature represents with mimeses, and art then adapts with distortions.<sup>142</sup> In this aesthetic, artifice is an adaptive practice of wilful infidelity; imposing changes upon a fragmented yet unified source text that is artistically lacking. Nature is framed as a series of texts: either due to being experienced through textual versions,<sup>143</sup> through the Aestheticist view of Nature adapting art,<sup>144</sup> or through a framing of subjective reception as a

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<sup>142</sup> Elucidated by Wilde in *The Decay of Lying* (1891), itself inspired by *À rebours*’ aesthetic theories.

<sup>143</sup> Ziegler says that whilst Zola’s Naturalism came from observation, Huysmans’ came almost exclusively from the works of others – that his engagement with the external world is purposefully derivative, prefiguring the approaches of Des Esseintes, his most famous character. For Ziegler, Huysmans engages with reality in his works only if it has been previously aestheticised (2004: 14). However, Griffiths has argued that Zola frequently relies on intertextuality, *ekphrasis*, and adaptation in similar, if more submerged ways (2011), such as the intermediality which sees him translating “the visual techniques of the Impressionists into fiction” (2013: 8).

<sup>144</sup> Found in Gautier, Pater, and Wilde, and seen in the flowers of Chapter Eight in *À rebours*, where “not one of them looked real; it was as if cloth, paper, porcelain and metal had been leant by man to Nature to enable her to create these monstrosities. Where she had not found it possible to imitate the work of human hands, she had been reduced to copying the membranes of animals’ organs, to borrowing the vivid tints of their rotting flesh, the hideous splendours of their gangrened skin” (Huysmans, 1956: 87).



representation, a mediation, as found in the work of Baudelaire. These last two in particular are interrelated, and anticipate post-structuralist and postmodernist semiological ideas of the world as signs and texts.<sup>145</sup> This extension of the aesthetic into the philosophical is repressed somewhat in Adaptation Studies 2.0's use of intertextuality, as it problematises borders between adaptation and representation.

In the Decadent view presented in *À rebours*, Nature's texts (not mediated in conventional forms) have no prior claim to supremacy, and require redemption in the active reception of interpretation, in representation, and in adaptation. With each re-presentation they are distilled and refined by the authored artistry of artifice. They are a base form of raw textuality, unrefined by authorial intervention and lacking the artifices of style. They must be represented,<sup>146</sup> and ideally then adapted. Therefore a key negotiation within *À rebours*, and an example of Decadent style as itself being the subject of the narrative (Halpern, 1978: 93), is found in the way that under this aesthetic philosophy, Nature is adapted to the novel for Huysmans, and to the house for Des Esseintes.

The artificial retreat in the novel's narrative content, and its stylisation of the external world via subjective authorship, allegorises the adaptation of reality<sup>147</sup> as a collection of texts into the artifices of Decadent style by Huysmans in the creation of the novel. To write a novel in and about Decadent style, Huysmans cannot represent Nature and immerse the reader, but must adapt it by ornamenting the mode of representation after the source has been decayed further into textuality by the three aforementioned methods. Due to these treatments of

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<sup>145</sup> Donato sees Huysmans as anticipating the postmodern claim that reality is nothing but textual (2004: 5), an idea explored throughout this research in conjunction with the argument that Huysmans is doing what Griffiths claims for her nineteenth-century authorial case studies: that they anticipate "elements of intertextual theory" (2013: 8).

<sup>146</sup> Though in this framework this too is an adaptation – all representation is adaptation, or at least intertextuality, if the world can only be accessed as a series of textual forms. There are merely adaptations of differing degrees of artifice based on their proximity to the source, and for Decadence, distance (brought by infidelity) is central to art.

<sup>147</sup> Of course still an unstable term, but denoting source texts without mediation and notable authorship, and utilised following its use by Decadent theorists such as Antosh (1986), Donato (2004), and Ziegler (2004).

Nature as a text, adaptation theory becomes a relevant methodology for examining the Decadent creations of *À rebours*; questioning the analytical boundaries placed around adaptive textualities.<sup>148</sup>

Further examples of Huysmans' view of the textuality of Nature can be found in *Là-bas*, where the historical character of Gilles de Rais appears as "the text of a text of a text" (Hanson, 1994: 146), and indeed, all of Durtal's historical researches evidence "little concern" for accurate documentation (Antosh, 1986: 71).<sup>149</sup> Instead, Huysmans' post-Des Esseintes avatar pursues research which will stimulate his imagination, as a *tremplin*,<sup>150</sup> an adaptive engagement with a non-fictional source, where the texts are formed into an adaptation that grants a reception which distances the subject from themselves. For Donato, Huysmans sees history as textualised (2004: 4), and infidelity to these texts invokes the textuality of realities, where the present is always on the verge of becoming aestheticised in historical documentation. Nature, for Huysmans and Des Esseintes, is a 'master text' or heterocosm constituted by mediations and an imaginative reading of the gaps between these - which is necessary in order to adapt from a fragmented text such as a heterocosm.

The structural dynamic of Decadent style previously identified is clear here: Nature is the faith within which the heresy of artifice operates.<sup>151</sup> Whether through ornamentation or decay, the source texts of Nature must be stylised into art, and in order to increase the artifice Huysmans frequently works with prior representations of these texts of Nature. Huysmans

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<sup>148</sup> As encouraged by Leitch (2007: 302).

<sup>149</sup> Indeed, Ivory says that Decadent texts "eschew historical accuracy" (2016: 106). Durtal's adaptive approach to his subjects recalls the adapting history approach, and Leitch on the historical 'master text' of many film adaptations (2007: 285), which often indicate relationships to sources that both are, and are not, texts (2007: 281), adapting the intertexts of reality frozen in a certain time and place. Indeed, Sanders and Hutcheon see history as a collection of textualities, of sources and intertexts for fiction to appropriate (2005: 146; 2006: 17).

<sup>150</sup> Huysmans' term for an aesthetic springboard (often an *ekphrasis*) which would lift him from reality and the present, propelling the audience-subject into escapist fantasy (Antosh, 1986: 55): "Huysmans' characters, despite their desire to isolate themselves, are sufficiently rooted in the real world to need a stimulus - Huysmans called it a "*tremplin*" - of some sort before their memories are revived" (1986: 55).

<sup>151</sup> A renunciation of dominant Romantic approaches, with their source-worship reminiscent of fidelity (explored in terms of adaptation by Jellenik (2017), and in terms of Baudelaire by Leakey (1969)).

adapts Nature and its representations via a transmuting into a hyper-stylised, almost unrepresentative language (Baldick, 1955: 481-2). Its foregrounding of surface<sup>152</sup> in the cult of the detail rejects any attempt at formal transparency and representation of Nature in favour of adaptive change: the artifices of stylisation altering source texts already artificialised to varying degrees via the three methods previously noted. The self-consciousness of the novel's form, with its exposed intertextuality, also evokes Stam's notion that these texts always "cast doubt" on the notion of an antecedent reality, the stable centre of mimesis (Stam, 2005ii: 23), by emphasising the process of construction.

This engagement with Nature as a source has its genealogy in Baudelaire's conception of subjective realism, adumbrated in the Salons of 1846, where nature is a 'dictionary' (1992: 66), and 1859, where to "copy nature; and nature only" is a doctrine "hostile to art" (1992: 298). In this interpretation, nature is a compendium text requiring selective engagement and rearrangement according to the imagination of the artist, who is the mediator producing 'realism;' the latter being a style expressing the manifesting of nature's arrangement according to that individual. For Baudelaire, the view of realism as a depersonalised engagement with objective nature is a fallacy, and the attempted depiction of 'objective' nature is only the borrowing of another's vision and betraying one's own (1992: 299).

Nature for Baudelaire is always mediated, always a subjectively framed and interpreted text where perception is a literacy which adapts in its reception.<sup>153</sup> The texts of Nature are always modified (decayed) by the subjective imagination, destabilising the notion of an objectivity which might be faithfully engaged with. Artifice and subjective authorial

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<sup>152</sup> Discussed by both Bernheimer (1999: 56) and Denisoff (2007: 37).

<sup>153</sup> This recalls not only the inaccessibility of the Real for Lacan, but also the way that "for Bakhtin, human contact and artistic practice do not come into contact with the real directly, but rather through the medium of the surrounding discursive-ideological world." Art does not reflect or refract the real as much as it refracts a refraction of the stuff of life, offering a mediated version of an already textualised, discursivised, and ideologised socio-ideological sphere (Stam, 2017: 247). This is an influence on this thesis, which seeks to demonstrate that rather than examining the transformations of particular adaptations, it is more useful to examine adaptation as a historically and authorially variable practice, determining how Decadent factors have been worked in and through concepts of adaptation in this case study.

interventions lose any pejorative associations within this aesthetic formulation. Artifice is inevitable, and art is found in the selections which decay and ornament the source, paving the way for increased artifice in successive adaptations, equalling more ‘admirable’ art in *À rebours*. If all imaginative interactions with Nature inevitably adapt the source via a creative hermeneutics of critical perception, then Nature is always a collection text inflected by subjectivity. It is a series of texts in itself which is textualised further by reception, artified again when represented, and where further adaptation creates heightened artifice (and therefore heightened art) through increased decay and ornamentation.<sup>154</sup> This is utilised by Huysmans as a Decadent dogma for worshipping artifice and adapting Nature in *À rebours*, for finding a new engagement with the external world that breaks away from the manner in which Naturalism utilised these ‘source texts’ in theory and practice.

The veneration of the artificial instead of the natural in *À rebours* is perhaps the most marked shift away from the Naturalism which had previously characterised Huysmans’ work. Whilst Naturalism does not worship nature in the Romanticist manner, it does venerate the principle of an external reality,<sup>155</sup> which, tied to an idealism<sup>156</sup> related to social progress (Brookner, 1971: 91), casts the depiction of that external reality in a moral light. For Zola, depicting the world as it is; accurately, scientifically, with microscopic and non-judgmental detail, is the way to force a change for those subjects denuded by that reality. This means that Naturalism is inherently concerned with transparent mediations (Collier, 1994: 8); its goal is “the undistorted reflection of the real” (Ziegler, 2004: 17).<sup>157</sup> Realism<sup>158</sup> as “direct translation”

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<sup>154</sup> The fragmentations of re-interpretation and the accumulation of new elements in re-creation.

<sup>155</sup> Keen as Zola was to “endorse the direct translation of reality’s raw material into fiction” (Ziegler, 2004: 20).

<sup>156</sup> Contrasting the way that for Des Esseintes, “anyone who dreams of the ideal, prefers illusion to reality and calls for veils to clothe the naked truth” (Huysmans, 1956: 15).

<sup>157</sup> However, it is important to note that Zola’s realism was not a naïve attempt at complete de-aestheticisation or an emptying out of style – of course it was in fact its own dense mode of stylisation, but one which attempted to convey the external world as completely and objectively as possible. Zola too relied on mediations though, as explored extensively by Griffiths (2011, 2013), where his novels nourish themselves on other works of art and are thereafter themselves adapted (2013: 1). It is perhaps part of Decadence’s challenge to what Baudrillard calls the sacramental aspect of classical representation (1994) that Huysmans, by acknowledging Naturalism’s

(Ziegler, 2004: 20)<sup>159</sup> is invested with a moral imperative when connected to the emergent sociology of Zola's determinism (Brookner, 1971: 97): to depict the objective reality objectively. Its representations seek mimesis in their catalogues of detail, in their precision. This is not a celebration of nature, but a celebration of the reality principle, the clear glass without the artificial clouding brought by the breath of the artist.

This is accompanied by an idealistic faith in the potential for realism's yoking to social progress (Auerbach, 1946: 512). Therefore, for Huysmans, the most effective way to distance his work from its previous associations with the Naturalist school lay in overburdening the mediation, making the mode of representation central, and turning it from re-presentation of an objective reality to adaptation of a destabilised reality-text, where realism is a function of style serving under the dominion of artifice. Baudelaire too saw realism's mimetic perpetuation of the natural as a crime (Brookner, 1971: 74).

Wall-Romana sees this break away from mimesis as leading to a great facilitation of "transfers and contaminations, that is interart innovation" (2012: 30), a freeing up of nineteenth-century media and texts, based on connections between art forms which were no longer merely separate windows onto reality. Even aside from this influence on their textual adaptations, both Huysmans and Baudelaire seem to be utilising an anti-realist polemic in order to themselves 'adapt' in a personal sense, in terms of finding their individuality, shaking off the anxiety of influences; the latter's early Romanticism,<sup>160</sup> the former's Naturalist classification.

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reliance on textuality and adaptation by exposing intertextuality in Decadence, writes back against the dissimulations which claim transparency.

<sup>158</sup> See Furst & Skrine (1971: 5) for the inseparability of realism and Naturalism.

<sup>159</sup> Catrysse (1992 & 1997) discussed adaptation as translation.

<sup>160</sup> Leakey traces the development of Baudelaire's early Romanticist beginnings, a mantle taken up first in juvenilia and carried onward, with its attendant celebration of nature. It is not until "the early months of 1852" (1969: 104) that we see any hint towards the anti-naturalist stance that would come to define the general impression of Baudelaire's relationship with nature, and which would be the pre-eminent aspect of this complicated and changeable interaction embraced by the Decadents in the *fin de siècle*.

*À rebours* adapts<sup>161</sup> Naturalism's transparent depiction of reality, increasing stylisation through an excess of authorial mediation. Whilst Naturalism requires an objective reality in order to enact its social mission, *À rebours'* Decadent style rejects this to make Nature as much of a text as any other source, even before the use of representations as preferred sources.<sup>162</sup> It builds upon Gautier's Aestheticism, which propounded the view of nature as jealous of art's eternity,<sup>163</sup> as well as the idea taken up by Baudelaire of the world as a 'dictionary of forms' re-assembled by the artist (Snell, 1982: 58-9). It anticipates Wilde's famous anti-mimesis from *The Decay of Lying* (1891), where life imitates art. In this formulation, which is linked to Baudelaire's subjective realism, Nature is a text shaped by the reader's prior knowledge of other texts, and so its representation is a purposeful adaptation within a dialogic web of intertextuality. From a fully Decadent perspective (not necessarily Huysmans'), Naturalism would seem to seek a sterile and mechanical reproduction of the Natural text, a fidelity discourse which fails to see that it merely plagiarises an already amateurish work.

Decadence views the texts of Nature as requiring major adaptive authorial intervention in various stages of decaying reception, artifying representation, and ornamenting adaptation.<sup>164</sup> Its crude source material must be worked into the artistry of artifice: nature's sketches must be finished off, her rough-hewn blocks of stone shaped (Huysmans, 1956: 88).<sup>165</sup> In this sense, the cult of the 'original' in Romanticism<sup>166</sup> (see Jellenik, 2017) and the fidelity discourse propagated by Naturalism is shown to be the unimaginative mimetic

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<sup>161</sup> Recalling Elleström on adapting conventions.

<sup>162</sup> Another idea echoed in Baudelaire, who also preferred a reality "already transformed aesthetically" to the "brute object" (Kelley, 1994: 178), just as Huysmans relied on imagery springing from art rather than nature (Cevasco, 2001: 34).

<sup>163</sup> In *l'Art* (1857).

<sup>164</sup> Where due to the ideas of textuality all of these stages have their adaptive aspect.

<sup>165</sup> Or where "the artist in perfumery completes the original natural odour, which, so to speak, he cuts and mounts as a jeweller improves and brings out the water of a precious stone" (Huysmans, 1956: 106).

<sup>166</sup> In *Là-bas*, when discussing Naturalism's "utter sterility," Huysmans has his character Durtal dismiss immediately any return to "the pyrotechnic nonsense of Romanticism" (2001: 6).

rendering of a source text which does not merit its privileged position. Instead, this text should be stylised and artificialised as far as possible in order to refine and sublimate it - for the sake of aesthetics - not for the sake of any moral principle. In fact, the moral imperative of Naturalism is an illusion for the Decadent, for in the flattening textualisations of Aestheticism, objectivity is lost, and aesthetics becomes equally as important as social intervention.

In *À rebours*, Nature must be adapted, not merely represented, as increased artifice equals increased art.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, excesses of ornamentation and fragmentation, and chains of adaptation are ideal for distancing the work and removing the tyranny of contiguity with the Natural source. This can be seen in many of the acknowledged intertexts in *À rebours*, such as the *ekphrases* of Moreau's Salome paintings, which are elaborations upon elaborations (Hanson, 1994: 123).<sup>168</sup> The notional *ekphrases* of imagined works function similarly, such as the bibliophilic descriptions of artefact-texts.<sup>169</sup> The Salome intertext is Nature's text represented (decayed) in historical fragments, adapted by Moreau with a high degree of ornamentation, adapted by Huysmans into criticism, then again via a denser *ekphrasis* which becomes part of *À rebours*.<sup>170</sup> These texts of texts or adaptations of imagined originals are spires of ornamentation, for their stylistic progression elaborates them further and further from the initial Natural source text.

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<sup>167</sup> So that Des Esseintes can withdraw "further and further from reality and above all from the society of his day which he regarded with ever-growing horror" (Huysmans, 1956: 165).

<sup>168</sup> They are also grounded in the idea of escape from the chapter's beginning, both in terms of contemporary reality and its depiction in art: "together with the desire to escape from a hateful period of sordid degradation, the longing to see no more picture of the human form toiling in Paris between four walls or roaming the streets in search of money had taken an increasing hold on him." Des Esseintes is therefore described as only desiring forms of art which deal with remote and fictionalised times and spaces, "wrapped in an aura of antique corruption, divorced from modern times and modern society" (Huysmans, 1956: 50). He escapes into art, but only the art that provides the right distance from Nature.

<sup>169</sup> e.g. dwelling on the materials of the copy of d'Aureville, where the paper is "blessed by the auditors of the Rota" (1956: 149), or the various 'texts' authored by Des Esseintes, such as the mouth organ (Huysmans, 1956: 45).

<sup>170</sup> Grigorian's work describes the Decadent interpretation Huysmans brings to the Moreau painting, highlighting the degree of 'decay' present even in this one movement of this text's intertextual chain of versions (2004). Elsewhere Varsimashvili-Raphael has examined the Salome trope as a crossroads of arts and styles, where Moreau's *oeuvre* inspires Huysmans and other artists to cross media borders (2016: 41-2).

Works which are part of the novel's intertextuality are objectified within the narrative of *À rebours* in ways which condense, enhance, and recontextualise, evoking notions of fragmentary or microscopic/microcosmic adaptation despite not being extended in any conventional manner.<sup>171</sup> They are often (in the case of books) condensed into a synecdochical objectified fragment-version of themselves,<sup>172</sup> framed by criticism which evokes the atmosphere or theme which is being adapted. Within the narrative world of the house, they are collaged into collection-texts, so that they are an intertextual fragment which is a part of a larger text (often itself part of a larger text), where each is adapting a textualised Nature to some degree, playing with ideas of fragmentation, and blurring lines between intertextuality and adaptation. Each creates a strange palimpsest with its acknowledged source representation, less a true palimpsest than a stained-glass fragment inlaid with pieces of the source which may be projected onto the pages of *À rebours* by the light of the knowing reader. These micro-adaptations,<sup>173</sup> which are chains of versions, are found throughout *À rebours*, becoming *mise-en-abyme* representations of the novel in the sense that it too is an *ekphrastic* adaptation of an imagined or notional text which is adapting the fragmented source mosaic of Nature: Des Esseintes' retreat.

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<sup>171</sup> Though perhaps in the case of *Salomé* we have an adaptation of atmosphere – an idea related to 'spirit' discussions – which comes from the very specific reading of the text by Huysmans, who represses its luminosity, according to Grigorian (2004).

<sup>172</sup> This participates in the "typical" Decadent style of rendering objects visible "by means of a baroque accumulation of layered images," and where the object is fleetingly described and "ranged alongside others to stave off an ever-imminent *ennui*" (Ivory, 2016: 111).

<sup>173</sup> An example being Mallarmé. A few of the poet's works are chosen from other works – "unique copies" – by Des Esseintes and collected into a single text, a volume which in its form micro-adapts their style and content. This occurs in the binding of the object, which "has that faded charm which Mallarmé extolled." These are not all whole poems – some are fragments, just as they represent the fragments of a Mallarméan heterocosm or *oeuvre*: *Hérodiade* only remains in the work as an evocative "fragment." This particular fragment within the collection is a *tremplin* which casts "a magic spell" on Des Esseintes at certain times. It must be curated with other texts and objects into a *tableau* or *micro-mise-en-scène* text, a re-collection that through analogies draws out the aura of this mosaic of fragments. Within a setting of dimness and silence, Des Esseintes utilises his memory of Moreau's painting in conjunction with the Mallarmé fragment, and she walks out of the reception space into his room as he imagines her brushing past him. She comes to life before him, conjured out of his oscillation between a physical *tremplin* intertext and a memorial one, and she speaks Mallarmé's words, which, as a fragment of a source micro-adapted by Huysmans to the novel, are present on the page. Both author and character micro-adapt this work in their different ways – Huysmans by dramatising the fragment, and Des Esseintes by using it as a *tremplin* to take him into a zone between texts where characters walk from one reality into another (Huysmans, 1956: 179-180).



Additionally, within this retreat and its employment of adaptive chains for the augmentation of artificiality, memory and imagination - as temporal deferments - will always be preferred to the immediacy of perception in terms of a relationship with Nature, as in the 'trip' to England (1956: 118-129), and the memories of lovers in Chapter Nine instead of real encounters. Even in Huysmans' pre-*À rebours* Naturalism, his descriptions of the supposed 'real' were derivative, based in prior aestheticisations (Ziegler, 2004: 12-14) which formed an "infinite regress" (2004: 14) of adapted works. This destabilised the notion of reality in his work, showing that for Huysmans, Naturalism (as the literary school he was formerly a part of) was only ever a style, never a scientific method, polemical tool, or moral imperative - unlike his mentor and the recognised father of Naturalism, Zola (Borghart, 2007: 215).<sup>174</sup> To complete the break with Zola and find individuality, this already problematising aspect of Huysmans' Naturalism needed to be heightened. Consequently, in the Decadence of *À rebours* it is not that Nature is present in an aesthetic form, but that it is absent, a deferred text only glimpsed through its adaptation: the artificial paradise of Decadent style, the collage of representational fragments, through which Nature is recalled memorially as spectral writing deep in the palimpsest.

As alluded to already, the controlling manipulations of authorship are key within this relationship. Creation according to the Decadent aesthetic of *À rebours* is always adaptation, for Nature is a series of texts further textualised by reception, and often deferred again through the adaptation of representations which have manifested this reception in media.

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<sup>174</sup> When the dutiful citation to Zola appears in *À rebours*, it describes "his sturdy, powerful temperament, enamoured of the luxuriance of life, of full-blooded vigour, of moral stamina." These epithets are far from Des Esseintes' tastes, and whilst Huysmans certainly wished to keep much of the style of Naturalism, if we consider his Decadent period a modification of that style which allowed more of his own authorship into its form, the connection between Zola and Nature in this citation is an interesting one. In describing *The Sin of Abbe Mouret*, a micro-adaptation outlines the "earthly ecstasies" of that novel, featuring "fertilising showers of pollen falling into the palpitating genitals of flowers," a "Garden of Eden," a "Hindu poem" singing "the glories of the flesh," of "living animate matter" and "frenzied procreation" in "crude colour" (1956: 169). This makes extremely strong connections between Zola's work and everything that is adapted and banished in the artifices of *À rebours* and its narrative. Zola's Naturalism is connected to that which is adapted, distanced - but also that which returns and must be compromised with. In this we can see the way that Naturalism becomes part of the Nature nexus in *À rebours* when we consider its relevance for Huysmans.

Creation here should always be an acknowledged adaptation, as this increases artifice and distance from the raw texts of Nature. Micro-adapted intertexts in chains of versions highlight this procession of representations, contributing to acknowledgement. Even if Nature is textualised, represented, and adapted to enhance artifice, it can always be further ornamented with additional, and more artificial, intertexts, in ‘chains’ of aesthetic versions.

The tortoise, as another example of *mise-en-abyme*, illustrates the structure of the Decadent creations of novel and architext. Not content with merely gilding the shell, Des Esseintes selects a Japanese drawing of a bunch of flowers and has it adapted by the jeweller, sketched out as a preliminary text in a border, and then remediated to the lapidary. The biological body of the tortoise has a shell which is made a text by Des Esseintes’ reading of it as such, a further textualisation of a Natural intertext through reception. This is then gilded as a “tegulated” mosaic of representations, as the artifices of textuality are added to the biological, though keeping the shape of the natural shell and the tortoise’s movement beneath.

Added to this mosaic is a collection of carefully chosen precious stones, intertexts which as a collection form a representation of a Natural intertext (a bunch of flowers), even if they were actually based on a representation of a Natural source (the Japanese drawing). The gems also have their own significance and symbolism, carefully researched and chosen as they are by the author of this text. The tortoise therefore becomes an analogue for the structure of the adaptation of Nature, though doesn’t quite manage to illustrate the way that the encrusting intertexts are often micro-adaptations (the gems are only refinements of Natural intertexts), or the way that the heterocosm of the base source text (the tortoise’s body as Nature) is actually a collection of fragments itself (Huysmans, 1956: 41-44).

A multitude of acknowledged micro-adapted intertexts, far from Nature’s texts, combine with decayed fragments of Nature’s texts to be arranged as the intertextual mosaic of

Decadent style, which is the adaptation of the collection of Nature.<sup>175</sup> They are themselves a collection, many of the fragments of which acknowledge the chains of artifice in their own microcosmic way. This is not only present in the novel's intertextual Decadent style, but is also allegorised in the narrative, the *mise-en-abyme* where Des Esseintes mirrors his author in creating his own Decadent adaptation of Nature. Merely many among multitudes, the notion of Nature's texts as authoritative 'original' sources is destabilised.

The way that Des Esseintes allegorises the stylisations of Huysmans might be further explored through the ventriloquist memory (Huysmans, 1956: 100-101), where Nature has been adapted to the staged, artificial *mise-en-scène* of a bedroom, a micro-adaptation within the larger text of the house. This too is a collage of fragments, which are often micro-adapted chain intertexts, and it is additionally deferred temporally as a controlled memory intertext instead of a present experience, another level of adaptation which disembodies even further. The room as a micro-adaptation of textualised Nature intertexts (the actress) and representational intertexts (the sphinx and the chimaera) is further augmented by an adaptation of Flaubert which overlays dialogue onto the scene, meaning that the fragments of Flaubert as source are present within the memory (and the novel's representation of it). An adaptation of a mediated intertext within the micro-text that is the room further stylises the Decadent adaptation of Nature, ornamenting the artifice and embedding a chain of adaptation within the room-text.

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<sup>175</sup> Another micro-adaptation representing method in *mise-en-abyme* sees the critical framing of Moreau's influences after the Salome *ekphrases* as engaging with the "sources of mythologies whose bloody enigmas he compared and unravelled; joining and fusing in one those legends which had originated in the Middle East only to be metamorphosed by the beliefs of other peoples, he could cite these researches to justify his architectonic mixtures, his sumptuous and unexpected combinations of dress materials and his hieratic allegories whose sinister quality was heightened by the morbid perspicuity of an entirely modern sensibility." A collection of fragments, themselves often adaptations in varying forms, are adapted as a source by an author who therefore had "no real ancestors," and utilised modes of collage to form a source which may be adapted in hybrid forms. These are intermedial in their creation and reception, stirring Des Esseintes "like the sorcery of certain of Baudelaire's poems," having "crossed the frontiers of painting to borrow from the writer's art its most subtly evocative suggestions, from the enameller's art its most wonderfully brilliant effects, from the lapidary's and etcher's art its most exquisitely delicate touches" (Huysmans, 1956: 56-7).

The 'original' source of Nature beyond the walls is complicated by the competing textualities, and by the acknowledged artifices present in the tropes of the scene; inversions of gender, artifices of performance, and illusory slippages between the sign and the signified. Galatean statues speak as reality appears mute, giving the appearance of a living textuality contrasted with an inert and functional Nature-text, required only as counterpoint and stimulus.

Des Esseintes and Huysmans' texts ventriloquise in the same way as Des Esseintes' mistress, frequently speaking not with accents borrowed from Nature's texts, but with another artist's voice, another mediation, creating yet more textual artifice, highlighting the distance from Nature in this collage adaptation. In this microcosmic 'text' within the narrative, this room which is a part of the house which adapts Nature, we see illustrated the fragmentary collage to fragmentary collage adaptation that is taking place in the form and content of the novel. Textualised Nature, representations of Nature, and adaptations of representations of Nature are combined into a decayed source which is adapted to create the house and the novel. These too are fragmentary, as are their fragments, and they often contain intertexts micro-adapted and denoting chains of versions to acknowledge the ornamentations of the artifice.

The adaptation of Nature, with its distorting stylisation into artifice, must be acknowledged not only for the purposes of identifying it as a potential adaptation, but also to maintain artifice, which requires the doxa of nature.<sup>176</sup> However, this is a balancing act, as the highest level of adaptive artifice does not mean the most changes - for here the source would fall from sight, and the artifice would be replaced, becoming the new 'original,' a reinstated Nature. The full simulacrum is not desired in Decadent artifice, only simulation.<sup>177</sup> Mimesis re-

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<sup>176</sup> Spackman (1999) and Gaillard (1978) have both written on Des Esseintes as being a prisoner of the doxa.

<sup>177</sup> For Baudrillard, simulation is the process producing simulacra, and the Second Order simulacra are those associated most closely with Huysmans and Decadence, for they develop during the Industrial Revolution under the proliferation of copies via mass-production. Des Esseintes aims to simulate, but does not desire simulacra, as

inscribes the reality principle and the fidelity discourse, becoming a version of Naturalism's transparency, albeit with a different 'objective' reality.<sup>178</sup>

The adaptation chains must be fragmentary, and the artifice must be constantly acknowledged in self-reflexivity, in order to prompt the frisson of the palimpsest, as in Des Esseintes' monk's cell 'text.' Here, the "delightful" (Huysmans, 1956: 62) effect is generated by the oscillation between the observer's (Des Esseintes') memory-knowledge<sup>179</sup> of "the unattractive crudity of the model [Des Esseintes] was copying and adapting," and the finery which is taking the place of the old rags (Huysmans, 1956: 62). It is the tension between the 'real' source and the subtle shifts of the adaptation, clear to the knowing audience who are able to observe through palimpsestuous reading the artifices imposed by the author.

In this example, the 'narrative' remains, whilst the form has been artificialised and ornamented,<sup>180</sup> creating a palimpsest where the source is recalled - "though not too clearly" (Huysmans, 1956: 62), for this might obscure the formal embellishments with too much immersion. By extension, the texts of Nature in this sense must be adapted into fragmentary forms via the decay of interpretation and the ornament of addition<sup>181</sup> in the new text as a whole, in order to constantly assert their artifice, their status as an adaptation. Unity carries too much potential for immersion, for making the palimpsest unreadable, and "masking reality" (Baudrillard, 1994: 6), so the adaptation of Nature is further ornamented by fragmentary intertexts recalling the theme of artificial stylisation. Therefore, the adaptation of Nature is a mosaic or collection-text of fragments, just as the source was in the various

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he needs to threaten but not completely break down the boundary between representation and reality, even if he considers reality itself a type of representation – it still carries some level of objectivity and reflection value, as otherwise its denaturing would not be a source of pleasure (1994). This is explored further via Des Esseintes' house in Chapter Five.

<sup>178</sup> *A la* Baudelaire (1992: 299), it is the 'borrowing of another's eyes.'

<sup>179</sup> The term "oscillation" for this palimpsestuous reading is Hutcheon's (2006: 121).

<sup>180</sup> Recalling to some extent Elliott's (2003: 173) 'trumping' concept of adaptation, though here the formal 'upgrade' is not intermedial.

<sup>181</sup> Just as the mediated intertexts must.

representations it was embedded within, many of which persist in the intertextual surface layer. Embedding Natural texts in fragmentary representations is a decay, whilst adapting these is an ornamentation.

This is seen in the aforementioned example of Flaubert's dialogue, which 'scripts' the scene in the bedroom, bringing a further layer of artifice in its intertextual acknowledgement. The script also reconstitutes the necessary opposition of the artificial/Natural dichotomy which becomes the 'knowing' aspect for the audience. Gaillard (1978) refers to Des Esseintes as a prisoner of the 'doxa' in his reliance on the source against which the opposition is defined, and it is true that this is both the structuring aspect allowing for the artificing of Nature, and also the binary which binds him to Nature.

In the ventriloquist example, the script is a fragment within the adaptation of Nature in Des Esseintes' interior. Through its status as a micro-adaptation whose source is already a representation of source texts derived from Nature, it highlights the differing levels of the play of artifice for Des Esseintes as knowing audience, whilst also pointing up the artificiality of Huysmans' novel through exposed intertextuality.<sup>182</sup> The script acts as a level disruption,<sup>183</sup> and defines the boundaries of artifice even as it complicates the notion of an 'original' through its deferred existence as Huysmans' description of Des Esseintes' micro-adaptation of Flaubert's representation, which has its own textual sources. These contributions of fragmentary texts of texts shore up the necessary binaries at the same time as they reaffirm the themes and further ornament the surface of both Huysmans and Des Esseintes' texts.

The intertextual use of other artworks to highlight the artifice of the broader adaptation might be conceptualised as a mosaic of adaptations, a Kristevan figure which risks conflict with the palimpsest metaphor, yet which might be illuminating in complementarity. Whilst the palimpsest describes the relationship between the adaptation and the source for

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<sup>182</sup> The room tableau is itself a fragment, a collaged and collaging micro-adaptation within the house-text.

<sup>183</sup> Mitchievici's term for the function of *ekphrastic* works in the artifices of the Decadent interior (2011: 17).

the reader, the mosaic explores the structural relationship between the adaptation of Nature, and the micro-adaptations of previously mediated works which contribute to the acknowledgement of the artifices of style.<sup>184</sup> In this model, the adaptation of Nature's texts exists on one level (the affixing base layer), the micro-adaptations of representations of Nature<sup>185</sup> on another as individual and self-contained 'squares,' dividing up the base layer for the reader, making it fragmentary and acknowledging the artifice, so that the simulacrum is always decayed by intertexts into merely simulation. This serves both Huysmans in his exposed multimedia intertextuality, heightening the idea of the artifices of style as adaptation, and Des Esseintes, with his active reception conditioned by an awareness of the creative process as adapter and audience.

For Des Esseintes, the micro-adapted works are "aesthetic grafts" (Mitchievici, 2011: 17) which ornament the house-adaptation into further artifice, fragmenting the foundational adaptation of Nature and destabilising hierarchy and immersion, yet keeping simulation from masking Nature's absence.<sup>186</sup> The individual works guide the reader towards an appreciation of artificial stylisation, an engagement requiring a palimpsestuous reading back and forth between the concept of the sources in textualised Nature, and the text; whether the *mise-en-scène* of the architext, or the exposed intertextual surface of the novel.

To create the adaptation mosaic of stylised Nature, with its built-up intertextual fragments of micro-adaptation, the Decadent author needs to undertake a two-stage process of adaptation.<sup>187</sup> To adapt Nature into artifice, to stylise it authorially, first that textualised

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<sup>184</sup> This works for the formal level of Huysmans' novel and its relationship to reality, and also for its allegorisation in the narrative as Des Esseintes' architextual project. Exploring the latter gives a more concrete illustration of the ideas.

<sup>185</sup> These may also be micro-adaptations of adaptations, which – depending on acknowledgement – may in this figure be less like chains and more like spires or pinnacles of ornamentation and decay.

<sup>186</sup> Which would become Baudrillard's idea of the simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994: 2).

<sup>187</sup> Corresponding to Hutcheon's "(re)interpretation" and "(re)creation" (2006: 8), and the rereading that comes before the rewriting in Leitch's adaptation-as-literacy (2007: 303).

Nature has to be further textualised by the adaptive reception<sup>188</sup> previously mentioned. It is internalised into the subjectivity of the adapter, where it is decayed. This is a conceptualisation of the way that it is fragmented, a process heightened in Decadent perception which affords this Nature no primacy and sees it as already textual. Pieces drop away in the memory of the adapter, aspects take on special personal significance and are inflated, combining with intertexts from previous works or memories into composites<sup>189</sup> which are worked into its now-porous form. This is the case with the texts of Nature, but it is just as relevant to the process of adapting more conventionally instantiated sources.

Whereas Decadent style was considered as being “a style of decomposition and disintegration” (Bernheimer, 1999: 55) in terms of unities breaking down through individual components attaining agency, this definition might also extend to describe its relation to a source.<sup>190</sup> In the previous discussions - with its status as a “dissolving” (Reed, 1985: 14) rather than a cohering art - Decadent stylisations could be thought of as either dissolution (decay) or ornamentation (artifice). However, in the current refinement, the adaptations that are a stylisation of Nature into artifice are first decay, then ornamentation, in terms of the stages of authorial contribution. These figures allow an exploration of adaptation as process within the Decadent aesthetic. The interpretive reception of the source text decays its apparent unity, allowing for the re-staging of the porous text now textualised further by subjective rearrangement, with ornamentations (additions)<sup>191</sup> creating the variations which complement the fragmentations.

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<sup>188</sup> A version of adaptive reception more obviously creative is also dramatised later on in the novel, as Des Esseintes discusses the way that the senses may take new impressions, magnify these tenfold, and co-ordinate them “to compose the whole that constitutes a work of art” (Huysmans, 1956: 105).

<sup>189</sup> Recalling Elleström from Chapter One.

<sup>190</sup> This suggests links to a work such as Cohen’s discussion of adaptation as deconstruction (1979).

<sup>191</sup> Ivory has described “the rhetorical devices of accumulation and embellishment” as “the mechanisms by which *things* are re-appropriated in Decadent works” (2016: 106).



Elliott's 'De(Re)composing' conceptual model for adaptation explores the interpretive stage as a productive breakdown, making texts open to recombination, and allowing for high degrees of 'infidelity' and mergers with diverse other forms of textual content (2003: 157). However, while in Elliott's formulation the text decomposes to merge with the audience in a hermeneutical 'underground' of generative hybridity,<sup>192</sup> the Decadent decomposition of Nature is less an organic senescence, and more of an accelerated and unnatural version, as well as being one which digs up the corpse mid-decay to gild its bones,<sup>193</sup> and interrupt interpretation.<sup>194</sup>

Decay here also has its root in Baudelaire, whose Salon of 1859 described the imagination as decomposing all creation (1992: 299), and this is similar to the idea of 'annihilation' in the process of Romantic creation. However, Romantic annihilation erases and then re-makes the world according to individual imagination,<sup>195</sup> a fidelity homage.<sup>196</sup> Decadent adaptation decays the text of the world into fragments, into a perforated, atomised version. This version is then stylised through rearrangement and ornamentation - it is not remade, for remaking privileges the natural source, as well as becoming an imaginative simulacrum, losing the sense of artifice, the tie to the previous version - making the palimpsest a single opaque page. Hence the Decadent engagement with Nature is an adaptation, a repetition with variation, whereas the Romantic is a re-creation. Romantic annihilation is the physicist's annihilation: a conversion of the sublime referent to radiant

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<sup>192</sup> Indeed, decomposition is a process which Abel sees as "fundamental" to both criticism and creative practice (Abel, 1980: 370).

<sup>193</sup> *A la* the previously mentioned *Katakombenheiligen*.

<sup>194</sup> This intentionality is evoked in Elliott's model via the employment of Eco's 'cult object,' where adapters effect fragmentation in source texts through amplification and rearrangement, the wilful infidelity of authorship allying this mode closely to the Decadent decaying of Nature as source text, the 'cosmesis' which creates second-order, artificial nature without being mimetic (Spackman, 1999: 44).

<sup>195</sup> As in Shelley's description of the creative process (1840: 64).

<sup>196</sup> Jellenik traces the roots of fidelity discourse in the Romantic period's privileging of originality and canonicity (2017: 46-47).

energy, a process here undertaken in the imagination, prior to a unified remaking of the world. Decadent engagement with the textualised world is better served by decay and ornamentation, for reconstitution in the Decadent adaptation does not annihilate and then re-present a unified world. Instead it represents the ornamented fragments of the decayed world, with its subjective intertexts like worms in a gilded corpse. It becomes an adaptation, a palimpsest showing two distinct layers, ornamented through the transmutations of style that come with authorship.

Decadent style “depend[s] on the reader’s responding imagination in order to take form” (Antosh, 1986: 30), a representation of fragmented elements built up through ornamentation, revelling in an artifice generated by conceptual oscillation between Nature and text on the part of the activating reader. It is evident in Huysmans’ comment on Moreau’s work - that the paintings broke into fragments in memory - that he was conscious of the changes and potential for layering in the reception process.<sup>197</sup> One aspect of this assertion might be refined when considering the adaptive reception of the Decadent adaptation of Nature. All texts decay in the memory, but it is not only here that the Decadent text fragments. As argued, it is already fragmented, both in terms of the decayed source text and the fragmentary mosaic structure of the palimpsestuous adaptation. As a product of this form, this thesis contends that the reception of Decadent texts forces a specific type of reading that must engage with two irregularly fragmented palimpsest layers. A grasping for totality is induced.

Reed describes the breaking up of the composition in Moreau’s work “in such a way that it can be properly reassembled only in the mind” as “a form of almost insolent

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<sup>197</sup> An example of this thinking is presented in a later chapter of *À rebours*, where Huysmans adapts Baudelaire’s 1869 poem ‘Le Gâteau’ (2010) into a narrative fragment, when Des Esseintes sees two children fighting over a scrap of bread, an intertextual relationship analysed by Riffaterre (1999). Riffaterre says that the reader awareness generated by intertextuality is typical of Decadent works, which are often redeemed by their exposing of the fallacy of literary representation as being dependent on external referents rather than intertextual exchange (1999: 78). This corresponds with many of the discussions regarding the approach to Nature in this chapter.

tantalisation" (1985: 147), utilising form to confer an approximation of the Decadent experience of characters like Des Esseintes upon the reader in an unsatisfying search for meaning, for a way to unify fragments. *À rebours* does the same, and indeed Reed notes that it is a tendency characteristic of Decadent style, and which therefore must be present in the adaptation of Nature. We move through Huysmans' chapters constantly grasping at cohering, organising principles that never quite fit, testing new frameworks of interpretation that will bring a satisfying totality, a system of meaning that is never fully attained, as the experience of reading the novel is one of attempting to negotiate disparate pieces heaped together.<sup>198</sup>

The novel and the house, as adaptations which stylise Nature into Decadent artifice, are fragments that signify an ontological lack, an emptiness expressed by the schism between form and content. Both texts are formal exercises, stylistic elaborations that are ultimately metaphysical dead ends. Their adaptation of Nature would seem to signify that for the knowing reader who can see both layers of the palimpsest, the fragments of each layer will, when read together, confer an ontological truth. Instead, in the imbalance between overloaded form and meagre content, where narrative peters out and Des Esseintes' "dead life" (Huysmans, 1956: 70) stretches behind him,<sup>199</sup> all the reader sees is a collection of tantalising yet unsatisfying fragments. The adaptation in terms of the full reading of its reception is therefore always deferred, never complete, for the source is decayed and the adaptation is fragmentary, referring only to its own artifice.

Nature is represented in limited<sup>200</sup> fragments,<sup>201</sup> and defined by layers of mediation that confer a nihilistic emptiness in their undermining of objectivity, truth, reality. It is re-

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<sup>198</sup> Reed sees the Decadent novel as a rosary of strung-together set pieces which only make sense in retrospect (1985).

<sup>199</sup> "Like an eremite, he was ripe for solitude, exhausted by life and expecting nothing more of it" (Huysmans, 1956: 63).

<sup>200</sup> The house is a place of obsessive boundaries (Ziegler, 2004: 23), even if these are frequently crossed.

<sup>201</sup> The discrete narrative units of the thematically organised chapters.

produced via miniaturised cells and memory fragments.<sup>202</sup> Reed sees a unified pattern as making itself felt to the reader of the Decadent novel, but not being set down in the text (Reed, 1985: 135-7), remaining only an impression, a half-realised order. The adaptation of Nature feels unfinished to the reader, generating an irresolution in the text's reception. Meaning is occult, half-perceived even by the reader who can decipher the palimpsest, constituting a partial or spectral recombination. Nature is present in decayed parts and ornamented beyond mimesis; neither Naturalist transparency nor Romantic recreation. *À rebours* seems to offer a unified reading across the adaptation that is its artifice, combining decayed Nature and the ornamented style of authorship, yet being more mosaic than palimpsest: parts are absent, and the unity of reading is disallowed.

The fragmented meaning of the Decadent text in Reed's conception might be thought of as a disrupted dialogism between the adaptation and the 'text(s) of Nature.' The reader is in the process of oscillation, constructing the palimpsest between Decadent ornamentations and the decayed referent against which they are defined. However, the text does not re-create the world in the Romantic mode, nor depict it in the Naturalist mode,<sup>203</sup> but instead re-presents fragments of the decayed world which have been rearranged and ornamented into authorial filigree. Therefore the dialogism cannot form a unified text either, and reality has been shown to be fictitious, and subsequently overwritten. The palimpsest relates the same atomised tale as the surface of the text, and the texts remain separate, yet linked. The engagement with this text is therefore one of oscillation between two fragmented versions, not of reading a unified representation. In this sense, meaning is corrupted not only by textualising objective, external Nature, but also in the structure of Decadent adaptation and its reception process. A 'whole' text is evoked by the possibility of conflating the source and the adaptation, but since both signify the illusion and fragmentariness of the other, the 'whole' in terms of a single

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<sup>202</sup> Terms utilised by Baudrillard (1994: 2) to describe the production of the simulacral real.

<sup>203</sup> Both methods which reconstitute a coherent text where meaning goes beyond the carapace of form and Nature remains a stable objectivity.

architecture of meaning can never be arrived at – an idea corresponding to Reed's 'tantalisation,' and evident in the collapse of content.

The adaptation structure of *À rebours* and Des Esseintes' architext moves the reconstitution of Nature from its Romantic locus within the imagination of the creator onto the reception process, hinting at a dialogism which might decipher a palimpsest that reveals the full order of meaning. Instead, the Decadent text presents fragments which only refer back to stylisation and surfaces. This serves to heighten the sense of meaning's instability, the textuality of reality, and the world's lack of objective coherence: ultimately, what Reed identifies as the failure of human ordering to unify non-human creation (Reed, 1985: 9).

When Nature is merely a collection of source texts, art does not reveal ontological truths, but only non-meaning and metaphysical instability.<sup>204</sup> Nature is reflected back from deep in the palimpsest to undermine Decadence. This is allegorised in Des Esseintes' music-induced vision, related just prior to the revelation of the threatening nature of his sickness: "steeped in bitterness and filled with disgust, [he] felt alone in the midst of tearful Nature, all alone, overcome by an unspeakable melancholy" (Huysmans, 1956: 191). The irresolution of the adaptation encodes and confers an impression of the Decadent ontology onto the reading experience, where the subject seeks meaning in fragmented surfaces and finds only its decay.

If the Romantics reduced the sublime world to *nihil* in order to remake it in their image, the Decadent adapter reduces its texts to fragments which are encrusted with gemstones and then represented, still atomised. This adaptation forms a palimpsest with a Nature now decayed into fragmented intertexts by the dialogic rewriting of the source, the two layers reflecting each other as uncanny doubles rather than presenting a coherent whole. Irresolution in the particulate construction of the Decadent text means that the artifice of surfaces remains the proposed aesthetic philosophy, even as it has been shown to be

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<sup>204</sup> Reed says that in Decadence, "art does not lead back to the organic world, but to the nothingness that man has discovered within himself and hence in nature" (1985: 9).

unsatisfying in the narrative. The lack of alternatives confers dissatisfaction on the reader who seeks a way to tie the Decadent text together and read it as a palimpsest with reality, in a way that will imbue both with a meaning beyond the reductions of pessimism.<sup>205</sup>

In this sense, this irresolute reception might be read as utilising a version of the instinctive mourning inherent to adaptation's fidelity response. This is the "grain of truth" that for Stam is responsible for the endurance of the faithfulness discourse (2004: 3). It describes the emotion of vague and faint loss<sup>206</sup> which may accompany the experience of an adaptation, a representation of a text which previously encapsulated a personal "latitude of signifieds" (Strong, 1997: 353) that now appear reduced. It is a hesitancy in the face of change, an unconscious yearning for mimesis that is paradoxical and even illogical, for the fact that the mimetic rendering would not be accepted as a viable text, but an uncanny and obsolete double. In making the adaptation of textualised Nature a central component of style, theme, and narrative, and doing this as a late Romanticism in association with Naturalism, *À rebours* could be seen to be generating the desire for mimesis in terms of representing Nature.<sup>207</sup> Through this, the artificial adaptation which decays the source texts of Nature and presents them in ornamented fragments will induce a feeling of loss for the reader who has been experiencing this acknowledged adaptation.<sup>208</sup>

This aspect of the fidelity discourse might be productively aligned with Reed's idea of the inherent 'irresolution' of the Decadent text. The adaptation which refuses the 'fidelity' of Naturalism and Romanticism's treatments of Nature might be seen to combine various

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<sup>205</sup> Huysmans admired Schopenhauer in the *À rebours* period, but as his faith grew, he began to reject the notion that "in the unintelligible abomination that is life, there simply cannot be nothing at all" (quoted in Baldick, 1955: 251). As a Decadent philosophy, though, Schopenhauer is celebrated by Des Esseintes, who states that the pessimist "came nearer to the truth," and with his lack of "promises of a cure for your inevitable ills," his "attitude of resignation and drift," Des Esseintes considers "his theory of Pessimism [as] the great comforter of superior minds and lofty souls" (Huysmans, 1956: 78-9).

<sup>206</sup> Elliott goes further in seeing it as a horror of the incarnated ghost (2003: 166).

<sup>207</sup> As both Naturalism and Romanticism condition their readers into seeking a complete representation of Nature.

<sup>208</sup> In some English translations, the adaptation is acknowledged even in the title *Against Nature*.

elements in order to purposefully manifest a feeling of not only tantalisation, but loss in the reader.<sup>209</sup> By further textualising Nature's texts, and adapting them in a fragmented form that acknowledges their amateurish, decayed artifice, where Nature is maintained as a dialogic source whose reading itself forms an incomplete and destabilised palimpsest, the notion of Decadent artifice as an adaptation of purposeful infidelity might be read as invoking that very sense of mourning for the lost or corrupted 'original.'

The desire to find a unified reconstitution of the source - whether in re-presentation, or in the palimpsest attained through knowing reception - and an accompanying unity of meaning, is evoked through the adaptive structure of Decadent artifice as a way to confer that same sense of mourning which is the centre of the Decadent ontology. In fact, the Decadent text's irresolution might be seen to go further than just inducing the instinctive mourning of fidelity responses, and, through the deferrals, fragmentations, and refusals of recomposition, to extend this into a state of melancholia: a textual version of the complex Freud likened to an "open wound" (1955: 245-253).

Melancholia, beyond the safe meaning structures and ritualised timelines of mourning, might be read as induced in the reader through the adaptive strategies of the stylisation of the texts of Nature. Nature is 'lapidated' in Decadent adaptation - and in this term the ontological result is encapsulated, for the stylised artifice of the Decadent adaptation is not a living version. Nature is the tortoise - that most memorable of Decadent source texts - which in the form of the animal, the novel, or the house, is gilded into morbidity. Lapidate may mean 'to encrust with stones,' or 'to stone to death,' and the Decadent adaptation might be seen to do both. It transmutes Nature into ornamented fragments that signify a suffocation beneath heavy surfaces that glimmer above a deathly lack of meaning.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup> Decadence therefore becomes the "despair" of Romanticism (Reed, 1985: 9).

<sup>210</sup> It is the opulence of the sensorium above the disease, the intoxication with its black kernel of addiction.

The dissolution and ornamentation, decaying and artificing of the world that is the adaptation of Nature undertaken by Decadent style is a motion of breaking down and building up that creates a beautiful artifice, but ultimately cannot be endured by the subjects. The tortoise dies, Des Esseintes sickens and returns to Paris, Huysmans moves away from Decadence towards spiritual naturalism and his conversion. The excess of analysis that breaks down the text of the world into the self, and the excessive synthesis that represents it in overloaded fragments, induce ontological collapse within the Decadent aesthetic and its adaptation of the texts of Nature. The subjects become Midas, the ultimate artificer, and saddest of all alchemists (Baudelaire, 1987: 78), in the transmutations which starve them of meaning.

These ideas will be returned to in more depth throughout the thesis, in order to explore the structure and mechanisms of this adaptation of Nature, the way that the adaptation fails to 'solve' Des Esseintes' ontological desires, and the way that this can be extended into a reading of Huysmans' asymptotic experiment. The adaptation outlined here underpins the subsequent examinations of *À rebours* as and as containing adaptations.

### Chapter Summary

As Decadent creators, Huysmans and his proxy character are here argued for as undertaking many forms of adaptation. However, from the notion of artifice as a product of the process of Decadent stylisation, where these might be thought of as *an adaptation*/adaptation respectively, both 'authors' can be seen to be creating an extended and acknowledged adaptation in the formation of the text of the retreat at Fontenay, and the text of *À rebours* which represents this as a notional *ekphrasis*. These adaptations are of a source text representing Nature, which is not a coherent single text, but a fragmentary mosaic of memories of a textualised world, combined with or further ornamented by representations of



reality, intertextual citations, and micro-adaptations. This idea has been read through a Baudelairean framework for engaging artistically with Nature which employs a perspective which might be thought of as proto-semiological or partially postmodern, and is in opposition to the fidelity discourses of realism and Naturalism.

The Decadent work, whether Huysmans' novel or Des Esseintes' architext, is posited as an adaptation in the Decadent aesthetics of *À rebours* – but one which adapts a fragmented and multiple source text of varying versions of textuality, standing in for Nature. This section has investigated the most extended adaptation which underpins other forms in the Decadent texts of *À rebours*. The analysis of the adaptation of Nature has introduced key ideas of structure, theme, and the way that adaptations can be posited as conveying an ontology, a Decadent experience of the world. Adapting Nature has been suggested to be the major adaptation undertaken to form the artifices of Decadent style, and one incorporating unconventional forms of adaptation in dialogue with other intertextual versions.

These ideas explore border zones between adaptation and representation within a Decadent framework, whilst using a personal version of the 'adapting history' approach to consider the representation of the world by the creator. This extends the logic of these concepts, as well as the semiological approach found in the post-structuralist spine of Adaptation Studies 2.0. It suggests that this perspective is already embedded in Decadent aesthetics, where the world is textualised to such a degree that Adaptation Studies becomes a useful analytical framework for exploring Decadent creation.

## 4. Adapting Fragments: Collecting and Curating

### Chapter Introduction

The focus of this chapter lies in the elucidation of the structural dynamics present in the Decadent adaptation which stylises Nature into artifice. This is done by proposing an analogical model for the particular creative process involved in the specificities of the Decadent undertaking. The primary Decadent adaptation is argued to fragment a key source text, to group selected fragments from this source text with other fragmentary intertexts (which might be allusions to representations of aspects of the source text, micro-adaptations of representations, or even personal memory intertexts only accessible to the unified creator-reader like Des Esseintes) as a collection representing a heterocosm. This is then adapted to a new context (via various processes of compression, expansion, recontextualisation, rearrangement, remediation, and micro-adaptation tailored to the intertexts involved) primarily through a curation which reorganises the collection, adding in new elements linked to the extant by analogies (such as newly created additional material, or personal memory intertexts attached to the fragments), to form a newly curated collection-text.

What is also explored in a structural sense in this chapter is the way that the Decadent adaptation product formed by this process actually houses other smaller texts formed similarly – collections and tableaux. The fragments that constitute all of these are also texts in themselves, and in their citation or micro-adaptation may actually represent their own threads of sustained and acknowledged (by their objectified diegetic presence) adaptation in the novel, more traditional intertextual adaptation threads existing alongside that of Nature for the reader who is able to activate them. The most significant example of this examined in this chapter is the Baudelaire poem ‘Anywhere Out of the World’ in its triptych and carefully designed set.

The exploration of these parts which make up various levels of adaptation mosaics in *À rebours* utilises analogous models for the structures that house them, and does this in the context of Decadent studies, the *fin de siècle*, and Huysmans' *oeuvre*. The house described in the narrative, and the novel which represents it, are investigated in terms of concepts attached to museums, in order to examine the Decadent adaptation as essentially curatorial. This allows the investigations of Decadent cultures of collecting and the importance of the appropriation or adaptation of collections in Decadent works and scholarship. It also suggests that ideas of the *bibelot* and the house as personal museum may have consciously and unconsciously influenced Huysmans' approach to adapting via, and representing, collections, where a method of curation suggests a version of self-adaptation and a rejection of Naturalism as a literary identity.

The connections between collections and temporalities, between Decadent texts as curatorial adaptations, and the concept of aesthetic time which links – via distancing – Decadent figures to the milieu of Parisian modernity, is also extremely productive for engaging with the Decadent desire for artifice seen in the character of Des Esseintes. Aura, as an essential concept for examining *fin de siècle* objecthood, and its relationship to literature and adaptation extends these ideas further, thinking not only about the way that adaptations take on a significance in relation to *fin de siècle* reproductions, but also that aura provides a way to connect the Decadent adaptation to the Decadent reader, in suggesting a model for reception which leads towards the temporal distances of aesthetic time desired by Decadent creators.

This is contextualised within the shift from Decadence into Modernism, as a link between the curatorial, the adaptive, and the mystical aesthetics suggested by aesthetic time and aura. This is the case for both the Decadent character wishing to transcend Nature in a habitable adaptation, and for the Decadent writer experimenting with aesthetic mysticism –

an idea traced back through Baudelaire and forward into Modernism, and shown to be the glimpse of the spiritual in the aesthetic posited as desired by Huysmans and his proxy. This chapter therefore examines a panoply of concepts relating to a posited Decadent model for adaptation. These ideas bring new conceptualisations of certain forms of adaptation (particularly the heterocosmic model so relevant in the twenty-first century), as well as exploring various factors related to Decadent adaptation in its cultural-historical and authorial contexts.

It has been shown thus far that the Decadent adaptation which stylises the texts of decayed Nature into ornamented artifice relies particularly on ideas of fragmentation. The Decadent adapter utilises collage to form new arrangements, collections which themselves become texts, or micro-texts within larger configurations. Like the phenakistiscope,<sup>211</sup> the principle at work when representing this fragmentation is montage,<sup>212</sup> whether for textualised Nature, or conventional source texts. Huysmans encrusts the surface of the novel with these fragments, citing them in an acknowledged intertextuality that keeps the artificiality of form at the forefront of the reading experience, where artworks nod to the novel's status as itself an artwork. The lists of works break up the *ekphrasis* of the architext, just as for *Des Esseintes* they break up the adaptation of Nature by creating further 'level disruptions' of artifice. Individual intertextual citations on the surface of the novel also frequently signify larger adaptations beneath, as well as occupying their place in the palimpsestuous mosaic which is the adaptation of Nature.

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<sup>211</sup> A device of interest for Baudelaire which also utilised decomposition and recomposition as method (Grotta, 2015: 83). This reflects the cultural obsession with these ideas in the *fin de siècle*, where the dialectic between degeneration and regeneration played out on a broad scale across many disciplines (Luckhurst and Ledger, 2000: xxiii).

<sup>212</sup> As with the kaleidoscope, important for Evans (1993), who uses it as a figure which describes the bricolage of Baudelaire's *Petits Poemes en prose*. The description of a mobile sequence of apparently random fragments which coalesce into retrospective order might also be used alongside Reed's notion of the rosary to summarise the reception of the narrative structure in *À rebours*.

The collections of acknowledged intertexts are important for the artifice of both Huysmans' novel and his character's retreat. They conform to the classic mereological structure of Decadent style in their fragmentary nature, containing synecdochical versions of texts, compressed into signifying 'thumbnails,' an exposed intertextual layer of more conventional intertexts for the mosaic structure. Some of these are adaptations, some are less purposeful/extended/altering forms of intertextuality. In this, the house and the novel are both containers for an "aesthetic collection" (Villar, 2006: 1). This is a similar intertextual method to Huysmans' previous collaging of styles in *Le drageoir aux épices* of 1874 (2005),<sup>213</sup> or the famous description of Baudelaire's Decadence by Gautier: an amassing of colours from all palettes,<sup>214</sup> and notes from all keyboards. The collections are eclectic and transmedial collage texts,<sup>215</sup> relying on the synaesthetic reception inherent to the Decadent sensorium to make connections between disparate works. Within the narrative content, the adaptations of Nature to artificial analogues, and of the subjective (personal sense memories) to objects, are curated into new texts by Des Esseintes. These are texts like the taste symphonies, which are compositions based on a curation of intermedial fragments into analogical relationships (the liqueurs and their analogically connected sense memories).

Collecting is central to Decadent writing (Potolsky, 2013: 72). For Potolsky, Decadent collections are "idiosyncratic assemblages" (2013: 72), forming against-the-grain canons which challenge the accepted cultural architecture. Their blatant artifice (Potolsky, 2013: 72) reveals the mechanisms within the formation of canons, a demystification similar to adaptation's mobilisation of texts, where new contexts or readings point up the mutability of

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<sup>213</sup> Both Antosh (1986: 28) and Acquisto (2007: 68) see Huysmans' *Le drageoir aux épices* as an early pastiche or rewriting of Baudelaire's *flânerie*, whilst Acquisto also explores the work as an intertextual collection of various literary styles.

<sup>214</sup> In this sense we can see the thread which leads from Naturalism into Decadence for Huysmans, as in 1877, in an article describing Zola and the Naturalist mission, Huysmans wrote that "we use every colour on the palette" (cited in Baldick, 1955: 64).

<sup>215</sup> Where collage conflates the collection and the artwork (Putnam, 2001: 12).

canonicity, hierarchy, and inscribed meanings; and the potential for alterity. Collecting also provides useful resonances for thinking through Huysmans' practice in *À rebours* as innovative.<sup>216</sup> This is due to the "central role" that collections also play within Modernist practice (Braddock, 2012: 1), where many artworks themselves resemble collections in the manner of *À rebours* and its fragmentary surface of micro-adaptations that contribute to the adaptation of Nature. One example of an intertextual collection early in the novel which reveals artifice through exposed intertextuality, challenges canonicity, and adapts a collection as a source text of unified fragments - which shows that this method is utilised for micro-adaptations as well as that of Nature - is the Latin library.

Books are perhaps the most important items in *À rebours*. Their extensive intertextuality "inserts a critical discourse" into the novel, as well as suggesting the "inert and isolated 'shelf-life' of Des Esseintes" (Zimm, 2004: 306). Many are part of appropriated collections. Each small library is a "displaced bibliography" (Zimm, 2004: 312) within the whole cumulative library in the house, defining the collector of the works. Fragments reveal or acknowledge texts of which the novel might be considered an adaptation, and so the novel innovates by analysing its derivativeness, as Des Esseintes explores his own literary origins (Bernheimer, 1998: 368)<sup>217</sup> through books that are "sickly" - a prerequisite for his taste (Huysmans, 1956: 146).<sup>218</sup> One instance of an appropriated collection is the Latin volumes, lifted from the critic Désiré Nisard - not as an affiliation, but as an inversion. The Latin library chapter is an appropriation of a catalogue and a micro-adaptation of a critical work, a

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<sup>216</sup> A contribution to the idea of Decadent style as not being a celebration of decline, but also being forward looking in its experimentalism, as noted recently by Murray and Hall (2013: 4).

<sup>217</sup> Des Esseintes examines Baudelaire and Verlaine whilst "looking for his antecedents" and discussing literary borrowings that never amounted to thefts (Huysmans, 1956: 170).

<sup>218</sup> Though Des Esseintes' taste requires books that have "a disquieting vagueness" that allows him a more creative reception, adapting the work to his own preferences, enjoying it "for what it allowed him to bestow on it" (Huysmans, 1956: 165). Gautier is criticised for being unable to function as a *tremplin* for Des Esseintes, where his work lacks the "makings of a dream," failing to open up "one of those lively vistas that enabled him to speed the weary flight of the hours" (1956: 174).

reclamation of Decadence as a term from its “pejorative” (McGuinness, 2003: 232) original context.<sup>219</sup>

This is an adaptation by Huysmans which is perhaps not one of those undertaken also by his character. It establishes a subversive “perverse connoisseurship” (Potolsky, 2013: 78), an iconoclastic transposition embedding Nisard within the tendency he condemned, making Nisard’s own researches the “sterile erudition” of Decadence he had described. Whereas Nisard sees Decadent erudition and descriptive detail as evidence of “vitiated passions and lack of inventive power” (North, 1999: 86) - with content and form as symptoms of degeneracy - Huysmans shows the creativity possible in these adaptive modes by utilising appropriation to turn Nisard back against himself. This works to negate the judgments in showing Nisard to be practicing that backwards look against which he preached, as well as revealing the adaptive mode to be one with more creative potential than is described by the critic; a rebellious erudition rather than a sterile and imitative one. *À rebours* forms “outsider canons” (Potolsky, 2013: 72) in modes like this, where some texts are dismissed and others venerated, while all are couched in re-readings that destabilise canonicity and source authority.<sup>220</sup>

The inventories of intertexts are at times micro-adaptations of an extant collection like Nisard, texts collecting textual fragments, housed within the larger texts of the house and the novel. At other times Huysmans, and sometimes through the revelation of purpose and process, *Des Esseintes* too, form their own collections for adaptation to a micro-text within the novel. These contain works which are individual fragments that take up varying degrees

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<sup>219</sup> The source is Nisard’s *Moral and Critical Study of the Latin Poets of the Decadence* (1834), “the first major anatomisation of a Decadent aesthetic,” and one largely “hostile” to the concept, arguing for a revival of Classicism to quell the modern devolutions (North, 1999: 83), pre-empting Nordau’s 1892 *Degeneration*, and influencing Bourget (see Kamerbeek, 1965 for Bourget’s debts to Nisard).

<sup>220</sup> The collections reject the more frequent role of adaptation in perpetuating canons (Sanders, 2005: 8), and instead realise the practice’s potential to interrogate - a necessary cultural role according to Sanders (2005: 97). The rejection of accepted judgments destabilises the canonical interpretations of standardised meanings that attend the sanctified texts (Leitch, 2007: 16).

of intertextual relationship, whether as citations which appear before being submerged into the intertextual subconscious - depending on the reader's knowledge - or where they are more extensively adapted.

### Surface Fragments I: Adapting Baudelaire

Acknowledged texts, present within the novel's diegesis and therefore exposed intertexts for both adapters, are not only present as level disruptions or further pinnacles of artifice. They have other layers of collective function, and individually, they may also signify extended adaptations which the text as a whole is undertaking.<sup>221</sup> The next two sections of this chapter examine some of these acknowledged citations and the smaller collections they form within the intertextual collection which is the fragments of Nature. These intertexts are explored via their objectification in the narrative, their intertextuality – and their micro-adaptation as a part of this - and as some of the most important strands of adaptation within the formation of the novel and its allegory in the project it describes. These adaptations have the relationship to Nature described in the previous chapter, but also more specific valences of adaptation.

As the source text of Nature might be considered as a heterocosm, Baudelaire too is argued for here as being adapted as a heterocosm of theory and practice determining Decadent themes, plus possibly inspiring the interplays of intertextuality, intermediality, and other textual strategies. Not only is a Baudelairean heterocosm adapted, but in one particular acknowledgement of this – the objectified Trinity of poems on Des Esseintes' chimney, represented *ekphrastically* by Huysmans – we see the ways that citation uses micro-adaptive techniques, and how this interplay works across the *mise-en-abyme* of the fictional and the authorial. Most importantly, the section will argue that one of these texts in particular

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<sup>221</sup> Whether the notional adaptation that is the architext of Des Esseintes, or Huysmans' novel itself.



presents a clear case for being an extended, acknowledged adaptation; a stable core at the centre of the heterocosm source text, and one whose thematic centrality to the project of Des Esseintes suggests his architext, and *À rebours* itself, as adaptations of this text.

Baudelaire's work is a particularly significant adaptation in *À rebours*, and emerges through fragmentary citations on the novel's surface, which are also objectified in Des Esseintes' home. The debt to Baudelaire as theorist<sup>222</sup> of the aesthetics of the novel - including its adaptations, is itself an acknowledged adaptation. Baudelaire's work is frequently invoked, and often discussed in criticism embedded in creative practice.<sup>223</sup> Even before examining the literal presence of Baudelaire's work in the novel's diegesis, the influence throughout in terms of subject matter, themes, and style is unanimously agreed upon by scholars of Decadence. Baldick quotes d'Aurevilly's contemporary comment that "the Satanic Baudelaire, who died a Christian" must be a favourite author of Huysmans, "for one can feel his presence, like a glowing fire, behind the finest pages M. Huysmans has written" (1955: 136). Similarly, Praz sees *À rebours*' descent from Baudelaire as obvious, signified even in the title, with the taste of Des Esseintes being "in conformity with the most orthodox doctrines of Baudelaire" (1933: 323), though perhaps made excessive and exaggerated. According to Antosh, Huysmans rediscovered Baudelaire around the time of *À rebours* after losing touch with this predecessor in his Naturalist period (1986: 28).

The themes of the artificial paradises of novel and house are evoked in Huysmans' descriptions of Baudelaire, which detail "hybrid passions, exacerbated by the impossibility of

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<sup>222</sup> Brookner describes the influence of Baudelaire on Huysmans' art criticism (1971: 149), suggesting an ancestry of theoretical principles as well as literary themes.

<sup>223</sup> Potolsky sees this praise as being curiously "flat" and "stereotypical" compared to that of other authors cited intertextually, though the function of Baudelairean ideas throughout the novel points to a more concerted involvement (2013: 91). Huysmans does have Des Esseintes say that "his admiration for this author knew no bounds," and follows with over a page of heady description that – *pace* Potolsky – is not particularly flat in my interpretation, though is perhaps stereotypically Decadent. For example: "there, near the breeding-ground of intellectual aberrations and diseases of the mind – the mystical tetanus, the burning fever of lust, the typhoids and yellow fevers of crime – he had found, hatching in the dismal forcing-house of *ennui*, the frightening climacteric of thoughts and emotions" (Huysmans, 1956: 133).

obtaining complete satisfaction,” which attempt to conquer the mind’s boredom in “the October of its sensations.” The reverence is also found – like the triptych – in the later adaptation to object which is the one-of-a-kind volume of Baudelaire’s works. Bindings are a favourite medium of Des Esseintes (1956: 132-4),<sup>224</sup> and Huysmans has his bibliophile character adapting literature to the world of objects. Des Esseintes is the arch consumer: his spiritualising of aesthetics is the luxurious drive of Capitalist opulence. In the adaptations that extend his texts beyond their literary boundaries, he effects a materialist, inverted sacramentalism that channels the aesthetic into the luxury object. His adaptation to object, his experience of the work in its new setting, enhances reading through the new context, for as he “rereads certain pieces” from his “priceless” volume of Baudelaire, they seem to him “deeper and subtler than ever” (Huysmans, 1956: 132). There is certainly a sense that Huysmans is relating these experiences with an irony intended to mock his character, and possibly to satirise materialism.

Des Esseintes seems less interested in reading than in recalling reading whilst handling or looking at objectified works. In this sense, the intertexts in his library have been adapted to a palimpsest of objectification and memory, a collapsing into a physical form which acts as a synecdoche or *tremplin* summoning up the memory of previous reading experience. These exist as fragments signifying a decayed interpretation in the memory. The aspect of adaptation to synecdoche or *tremplin* is further suggested by the analogies which link textual

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<sup>224</sup> “He could not bear to have his favourite authors printed on rag-paper, as they were in other people’s libraries, with characters like hobnails in a peasant’s boots” (Huysmans, 1956: 131). The volume of Baudelaire is printed “with the admirable episcopal type of the old house of Le Clere, in a large format similar to that of a mass-book, on a very light Japanese felt, a bibulous paper as soft as elder-pith, its milky whiteness faintly tinged with pink. This edition, limited to a single copy and printed in a velvety China-ink black, had been dressed outside and lined inside with a mirific and authentic flesh-coloured pigskin, one in a thousand, dotted all over where the bristles had been and blind-tooled in black with designs of marvellous aptness chosen by a great artist” (Huysmans, 1956: 132). Huysmans is here creating a notional artefact for *ekphrasis* which acknowledges a key intertext, whilst the importance of the work for Des Esseintes’ retreat is clear in the expense and care of this adaptation to object, this condensing of themes and style into the medium of bibliophilic objecthood, where the heterocosm becomes a dense fragmentary synecdoche for itself.

content to newly bound form. The objectification also allows for a great degree of displayed collection.

Even above the aforementioned “priceless volume,” the most important citation of Baudelaire’s work collected in *À rebours* is the triptych of prose poems mounted on Des Esseintes’ chimney, a notional *ekphrasis* unpacked early in the novel (1956: 17). Within the narrative world, the poems are manifested as single physical instantiations, a process incorporating copying and alteration in the adaptation to artefact, where the display of these objects in a sacral style reworks the reproducibility of printing through religious iconicity.<sup>225</sup> It is a way to rewrite the debasing embodiment required by the poems, a reclaiming of materialism and reproduction, and a way for Des Esseintes to introduce his adapting authorship, adding to the chain of artifice.

The objectifying rewriting makes the poems synecdochical fragments in a new medium (more clearly balanced between the visual and verbal), visually standing in for the whole poem which is recalled by Des Esseintes as a memory when a glimpse of the triptych is caught. This is a typical mode of adaptation in *À rebours*: the collapsing of a source into an object which retains and stimulates the memorial experience of the text, becoming a palimpsestuous composite of the source adapted to memory and to artefact. This is frequently how the micro-adaptations on the intertextual surface of the novel are represented within its narrative: as objectified *tremplins* for the character.

Reading this within the narrative world, and considering Des Esseintes as adapter, this adaptation is to a different form of textuality, an object-mnemonics. It requires a personal version of adaptation on the part of the character, transferring the text to synecdoche. This is achieved by utilising the overlap between Des Esseintes’ memory of the work’s experiential dimension (the previous reading experiences), and the evocation effected by turning the work into an aesthetic symbol, to combine with other elements in arrangement and previously, in

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<sup>225</sup> Donato sees this as restoring “the ritual value of art” (2004: 119).

the binding. Both require interpretation and its subsequent embedding in directed practice.<sup>226</sup> This critical dimension, where a theme or aspect of the book's style that resonates in Des Esseintes' *mise-en-scène* is externalised in the binding, structures the materiality of that binding as a creative medium, a meaningful configuration. The book's objecthood becomes an extension of its other elements, an adaptation effected by Des Esseintes' critical interpretation and understanding of its new context (the text of his room).

In method, as well as in the Baudelairean intertexts, the objectification recalls Des Esseintes' theorising of the prose poem as an ideal form,<sup>227</sup> for this also relies on a compressing adaptation. The analogous condensing or distillation which creates a doubled materialist/memory 'essence' of a text in the novel is a citation acknowledging an extended adaptation not only on the part of Des Esseintes, but also for Huysmans in the formation of this character and his narrative trajectory. Mickels explores this, calling the 1869 poem 'Anywhere Out of the World' (Baudelaire, 2010) an "intense condensation of Des Esseintes' existence" (Mickel, 1987: 156). The citation of this adaptation is similarly condensed and fragmentary for readers of the novel, because the citation of the titles without description of the poems in anything but a visual sense leaves them as glimpses on the wall. Only the knowledgeable, previously initiated audience is allowed into this extended adaptive part of the intertextual layer. While this is a very concrete acknowledgement of influence, there is a sense that this and the other two poems remain as essential fragments, extruding from the surface of the novel at this point, yet like icebergs carrying the bulk of their existence below.

For Des Esseintes, not only are the texts elaborated into more visual and compressed forms relying on memory, but part of the change which suggests the acknowledging citation of

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<sup>226</sup> His creativity is often directorial, based on hyper-scrupulous outsourcing and delegation. He also extends texts further out of this initial objectification by embedding them in a set (as shown in the Baudelaire triptych) such as the "niches" of the drawing room, "which were styled to harmonise vaguely, by means of subtly analogous colours [...] with the character of his favourite works" (Huysmans, 1956: 12). These then become stages for reading within a micro-*gesamtkunstwerk* of *correspondences*.

<sup>227</sup> A theory itself appropriated from Baudelaire (Grotta, 2015: 33).

adaptation rather than a more mechanical reproduction is the interaction with a further medium and its contexts. The artefact texts, in their physical instantiation, must exist within a space, in relation to other objects. They are positioned deliberately by Des Esseintes, the author of the architext, for which this tableau is a fragmentary part, and it is in their placement within the room that their meaning changes. Huysmans dwells on his character's choices for the construction of the room, its colours, materials, props, layout. The poems are the "finishing touch," placed between "two Byzantine monstrances of gilded copper which had originally come from the Abbaye-du-Bois at Bièvre" at the centre of the chimney-piece, which is itself "dressed in sumptuous silk from a Florentine dalmatic." In panels "fashioned to resemble lace-work [...] framed under glass, copied on real vellum in exquisite missal lettering and marvellously illuminated" (Huysmans, 1956: 17), the poems are objectified and then recontextualised to become part of a new whole.

For Benjamin, "the wrenching of things from their familiar contexts" is "highly characteristic of Baudelaire" (2006: 148), and here Huysmans utilises this aspect to situate Baudelaire intertextually, as a way to acknowledge the adaptation of the heterocosm, and specifically within this, the central poem in the triptych. Benjamin also says that recontextualisation characterises display (2006: 148), becoming a method, like fragmentation, through which Baudelaire uses textual strategies that mirror the convolutions of modernity. Here Baudelaire is displayed in a materialist form, purchased by Des Esseintes for his architext, and intertextuality is shown as a shopping for textual goods, while adaptation confers an ownership made clear in Des Esseintes' objectified display of the intertext. This suggests not only the adaptation of Baudelaire by both Huysmans and Des Esseintes in their respective works, but also through employing fragmentation, recontextualisation, and *mise-en-abyme* to acknowledge the source, there is evidenced the adaptation of textual strategies in an aesthetic theoretical nexus derived from Baudelaire, which influences the way adaptations function in the house at Fontenay, and in *À rebours*.

The further adaptation which is the recontextualisation, after compression and objectification, places the new versions as fragments within a larger, arranging text.<sup>228</sup> This might be characterised as a *mise-en-scène*, a spatial, visual symbolic display.<sup>229</sup> This is a meaningful configuration, a text in its own right in the way that context creates a religious framing for the poems through their placement and relationship to other objects, drawing out the aura (this concept will be considered in depth later in the chapter). The idea of the aesthetic religion which permeates Des Esseintes' house, and which Huysmans unfolds throughout the novel, is introduced by the text of the *mise-en-scène* and the way in which it arranges the objectified citations of the poems.

A further interaction makes the link between form and content important, where the aesthetic religion brought by the style of the *mise-en-scène* is linked to the temporal escape represented by 'Anywhere Out of the World.' When allied to the ascetic nature of Des Esseintes' discussions of his project, this interrelation represents in *mise-en-abyme* the whole text he wishes to create, the escape from Nature into a domain of transcendent aesthetics, "free of the corrosive effects of temporal existence" (Mickel, 1987: 154). The *mise-en-scène* and its embedded fragmentary work is a synecdochical intertext for Des Esseintes' whole Decadent project, and in the *ekphrastic* treatment of this by Huysmans (all layers: objects, *mise-en-scène*, house), its description, it is also a synecdoche for *À rebours* as a novel, and as an authorial experiment through the avatar character.

The poems intertextually signify the key themes which underpin the intentions of the Decadent project of decaying and artifying Nature. They evoke the idea of time, of escaping

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<sup>228</sup> The self-reflexivity of these forms is also acknowledged in Baudelaire's criticism, particularly via the concept of *mise-en-abyme avant la lettre*, where Baudelaire notes the potential for the leitmotif as synecdoche (Evans, 1993: 126), directing the reader to viewing a collection as an interrelated whole.

<sup>229</sup> Created by Des Esseintes in the realist reading, but a notional creation and its *ekphrasis* for Huysmans - though he is still practicing the same modes of adaptation as his character is performing by situating the citation-by-proxy in this way.

the temporal in a spatial retreat “synonymous with art itself” (Evans, 1993: 131),<sup>230</sup> and Mickel analyses them as perfect representations of the novel’s narrative and themes. In this sense, they conform to ideas of extended adaptation, with the whole text unfolding an expansion of the work’s themes. All three poems deal with time, with Mickel saying that they contain Des Esseintes’ past, present, and future, while capsulising the aesthetic value which organises the novel (Mickel, 1987: 157), the denial of time through adapting Nature.

The placing of the three poems as a triptych near the beginning of the novel, with their function as an acknowledged, synecdochical aesthetic credo, which represents the whole of the work in an intertext which has been adapted, is not a technique singular to *À rebours* within Huysmans’ *oeuvre*. *Là-bas* employs a similar method, hinting at the self-reflexive and systematic way that this acknowledged adaptation is used, where the source is interpreted, and an aesthetic theory and set of themes extracted and then dramatised throughout the novel. *Là-bas* uses a triptych too,<sup>231</sup> where the first chapter of the novel features (through dialogue) a critical discussion of Naturalism’s stagnation, a summary of Huysmans’ newly formulated aesthetic theory of spiritual naturalism, and an extended *ekphrasis* of Grünewald’s Isenheim altarpiece (Huysmans, 2001: 8-14).

Like the Baudelaire poems, this is a triptych mounted on a novelistic wall, representing in aesthetics a way for the subject to escape Nature’s time. The aesthetic theory of spiritual naturalism came to Huysmans through his interpretation of Grünewald’s Crucifixion (Baldick, 1955: 179), and at the beginning of *Là-bas* it is explained via this *ekphrastic* adaptation, which is the acknowledgment of the extended adaptation of this work that might be understood as a

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<sup>230</sup> Huysmans has Des Esseintes explain the temporal thematics of Baudelaire, evoking the idea of “souls tortured by the present, disgusted by the past, terrified and dismayed by the future” (Huysmans, 1956: 134).

<sup>231</sup> Both Potolsky and Mickel connect the triptych to the Trinity in these works, with Potolsky also describing the narrative as a Passion (2012: 92), firstly according to Baudelaire (echoing Benjamin (2006: 143)), and then the more conventional Christian image, as Huysmans moves through aesthetic versions, closer and closer to the spiritual content. Similarly, Mickel sees the chimney piece as created in the style of an altar, where “just as the Trinity is the basis of the Christian faith, so are these poems the foundation of [Des Esseintes’] existence at Fontenay-aux-Roses” (1987: 155).

significant part of the novel's full intertextual layer. The recurrence of this technique across these two most Decadent novels of Huysmans' *oeuvre*<sup>232</sup> suggests a degree of intention with regards to a purposeful adaptation of a work which summarises the aesthetic theory of the novel, acknowledged at the outset and on the surface to invoke palimpsestuous reading and self-reflexive artifice. It is a fragment whose function goes beyond merely shoring up oppositions between artifice and Nature.

For Durtal as Huysmans' avatar, Grünewald represents the aesthetic theory which he wishes to unfold in his work (the biography of Gilles de Rais), mirroring Huysmans' attempts with the novel. For Des Esseintes, Baudelaire represents the aesthetic theory adapted to form the architext. Suggested here is the importance of these texts for Huysmans and his asymptotic characters, moving towards the idea of Decadence as crucible for testing metaphysical ideas through aesthetics. This comes both in the importance of Grünewald for Huysmans' later Dolorist Catholicism, in addition to spiritual naturalism, and also through the recurrence of the striving for temporal escape in Huysmans' works.<sup>233</sup>

The triptych of Baudelaire's poems, the citation of the adaptation of both a specific work and a heterocosm, for both author and character as Decadent adapters, has been described as a small Decadent canon. Potolsky sees canon formation and appropriation at the heart of Decadent identities and allegiance to the Decadent republic of letters (2012: 92), describing Decadent identities as being formed by a "mimetic canonisation," where writers adopt the tastes of a "master," alter the selections according to their own tastes, and publish the selection as "proof of their affiliation." However, this must be opposed to what these writers saw as a genuine 'decadence:' the mimetic replication of the Classical canon and its texts in fidelity adaptation (Meltzer, 1998: 753). Their version leads to a community forged by adaptations of collections, dramatised in the fatal books of Decadent narratives, where

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<sup>232</sup> Though we may also include *En rade*.

<sup>233</sup> Mickel describes 'Anywhere Out of the World' as "of paramount importance to Huysmans' life and entire corpus" (1987: 156).



Decadent identities are “an effect of reception” (Potolsky, 2012: 94) and of rewriting, as in Dorian Gray’s adaptation of *À rebours*.<sup>234</sup>

Huysmans proclaims *À rebours* as Decadent in the Baudelairean mode with the fragmentary micro-collection of the triptych, an adaptation that sets up this allegiance at the same time as it adapts the poems in more concerted ways. The Decadent writers create their literary identity through reading Baudelaire, deriving a poetics from his work, and adapting this as a configuration for their own practice.<sup>235</sup> *À rebours* might itself be read as an adaptation of the Baudelairean heterocosm, pathologically intensifying tropes within a structure recalling a dissociative version of the Salons. Themes such as Schopenhauerian pessimism, ennui, intoxication, fragmentation, decay, and artifice all derive from the work of this poet who “frankly pursues beauty in decay” (Mathews, 2000: 2). Indeed, Huysmans’ choice to replace traditional plot structures with a prose-poem style of “thematic unity,” which is based in the veneration of artifice is an extended adaptation, a defining adaptation, of a theme derived from Baudelaire (Mickel, 1987: 154).

Despite a surface antagonism, a critical “conservatism” (Hiddleston, 1999: 32), Baudelaire frequently adapts in ways which may have influenced those of *À rebours*, just as the themes derived from his work also have a bearing on textual transpositions. Lloyd (2002:

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<sup>234</sup> Dorian becomes Decadent through the collections which are inspired by *À rebours* (Potolsky, 2012: 95-6), becoming a copy of Lord Henry, who was a copy of Huysmans’ novel, while in his turn Wilde proclaims himself a Decadent by “miming Huysmans’ canonical association of Decadence and collecting,” itself a reworking of Baudelaire’s ideas of appreciation with regards to Poe and Delacroix (2012: 97).

<sup>235</sup> Beyond being merely a “literary password and rallying cry” for 1880s aesthetes (Gamboni, 2011: 76), Baudelaire is in fact described as a theorist of Decadence by Bourget (1885), a position which is maintained by more recent scholars such as North (1999: 87). Baudelaire in 1863 defines the themes of Decadence through a theory of Decadence in his work, defending its preoccupations and predilections against the stultifications of Classicism (Baudelaire, 1992: 188-9). However, this is not consistent. Despite writing in 1855 against adaptation in the same way that at times he wrote against decadence (1992: 121) - not in the manner of Nordau against its literary form, but as an abstract idea - Baudelaire’s adaptive practice is in itself dynamic and innovative. In his theorisations, ‘decadence’ and ‘adaptation’ are conflated in Baudelaire in a marked mirroring of the commentaries of Bourget et al, a schism between implementation and critical theory. He sees the fusing of art forms as a hallmark of his period (Abel, 1980: 368), and amid defences of medium specificity, the poet denounces attempts at interart imitation in the Salon of 1846, asking whether it is “by some fatal consequence of decadence” that intermediality enters the fray (Baudelaire, 1992: 91). Grotta notes that Baudelaire’s critical comments on other media forms and transpositions are often skeptical, yet demonstrates that his practice shows extended and complex responses to new developments in these areas (2015: 2).

188) has discussed intermedial transposition<sup>236</sup> in Baudelaire's work in terms of finding analogies for techniques particular to other art forms, leading to an extended hybridity and consequent originality which might certainly be seen to have influenced Huysmans in his own tendencies towards synaesthesia and word-painting. Baudelaire's translations are frequently described as adaptations;<sup>237</sup> of De Quincey,<sup>238</sup> and Poe<sup>239</sup> in particular, whilst the *Paradis Artificiels* abound in appropriations of De Quincey, just as the Salons incorporate Stendhal (Calasso, 2012: 6).

Abel has also discussed Baudelaire's adaptations of Delacroix, both the more ineffective direct *ekphrases*, and what Abel defines as adaptations, the intermedial transpositions without a clear individual source text (1980: 378). Here Baudelaire does not replicate techniques in imitation - very few colour words are used - but instead utilises creative analogical equivalences, where sonorities replace colour harmonies, an assertion between patterns "consistent with Baudelaire's own belief in *correspondences* among the different senses" (Abel, 1980: 378). Infidelity, change, and intersensory or intermedial analogy are essential concepts in these adaptations, as well as Baudelaire's idea of 'temperament.'

In this latter concept, discussed in the Salon of 1846 via the example of Delacroix, a painter must retain originality after borrowing from all the right sources (Baudelaire, 1992: 65), an idea which evokes adaptation as an essential intentional aspect of the creative process, an intertextual engagement by the creative individual. All creative construction requires an

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<sup>236</sup> As well as intermedial theorists like Clüver and Elleström (both 2017), Wagner has utilised the term transposition for process within Adaptation Studies (1975).

<sup>237</sup> e.g. Salines (2004); Lloyd (2002: 206).

<sup>238</sup> e.g. Wilson (2016: 233); Muris-Prime (2014); Lloyd (2005: xiii).

<sup>239</sup> e.g. Peters (2013: 166); Jones (1945).

engagement with sources,<sup>240</sup> a repetition and difference, and Baudelaire clearly alludes to this in the Delacroix criticism. Memory is important here, both in the construction of the text, and its reception, suggesting the communal domain of acknowledgement within the intertextual layer. In viewing or reading, the spectator “experiences the shock of a powerful originality together with an overwhelming sense of recognition” (Hiddleston, 1999: 27), a view of palimpsestuous creation and reception which highlights the adaptive dimension of creativity, as well as the essentiality of memory to this.<sup>241</sup>

Evans sees Baudelaire’s collections, particularly *Le Spleen de Paris* (1869), as evidencing both a complex intratextuality and intertextuality, relying on the reader’s perception of modes of interconnection.<sup>242</sup> Baudelaire’s intertextual collections utilise compositional techniques of bricolage (1993: 3), relying on the audience’s hermeneutic skill in retroactive reading (Riffaterre, 1978) to create resonances and activate the whole text which previously appeared fragmentary. This structure is echoed in *À rebours*’ irresolutions<sup>243</sup> and the enforced adaptation to memory which is the recombinative intertextual participation of the reader, as well as the atomised fragments of the surface of the adaptive palimpsest, such as the triptych of poems.

The use of synecdoche, reflexivity, and *mise-en-abyme* in *À rebours* is vital to the functions of adaptation and the artifice in the textual surface to which it contributes.<sup>244</sup> These

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<sup>240</sup> Calasso notes that Baudelaire almost never worked from scratch, needing a pre-existing source, “some phantasm glimpsed in a gallery or a book or on the streets, as if writing were above all a task involving the transposition of forms from one register to another” (2012: 8).

<sup>241</sup> Baudelaire was certainly aware of the types of reading and textual construction which come with intertextuality and adaptation, with Grotta suggesting that his whole media aesthetics emerges from adaptive concepts of play and doubled consciousness (2015: 145).

<sup>242</sup> These are analogies for, and adaptations of, the experience of the modern city’s palimpsestuous arabesques for Evans (1993: 13), and of the madness of commercial exchange (1993: 22).

<sup>243</sup> Baudelaire’s analysis of Wagner contains ideas of irresolution, where according to Brelet (1949) resolutions between dissonant chords are always relative and partial, evoking a constant frustration.

<sup>244</sup> The rendering of the *mise-en-abyme* effect, its hermeneutic circle, requires an acknowledgment, creating both a “powerful textual symbol and aid to readability” even as *mise-en-abyme* is a way in which “texts manifest their fears about their own readability” (Dällenbach, 1980: 440-1).

might all be seen as devices adapted to *À rebours* as part of the Decadent media aesthetics present in Baudelaire's *oeuvre*, and acknowledged self-reflexively in the adapted Baudelairean artefacts of the 'trinity.' These are themselves synecdoches, instantiated *mise-en-abyme* versions of the whole text, citations encapsulating the adaptation in an arranged collection of three fragments which form a collected whole-text with the interior of the room, again evoking the layers of the adaptation of Nature.

### Surface Fragments II: Reworking Naturalism

Whilst the Baudelaire triptych represents a small collection of individual fragments, one of which might be signifying extended adaptation, Huysmans' engagement with Naturalism might be examined through ideas of adaptation attached to another collection within the novel, along with one of its significant fragments.

Huysmans' employment of diverse lexical sets from his Naturalist apprenticeship, subtly placing the old beside emerging vernaculars to draw out the most profitable elements of both, was effected through a repetition and difference and an awareness of palimpsestuous reading.<sup>245</sup> It requires a 'temperament' such as that identified by Baudelaire when discussing the balancing act performed by the poetic imagination between the "collective past and the artistic present" (Holland, 2006: 120), a delicate equilibrium between plagiarising the past and reworking it. This is the dynamic at the core of adaptation, and the Decadent bricolage of the ruins of the past (Zurbrugg, 1999: 211), which appropriates collections whose citations may indicate deeper and more sustained adaptive structures.

Potolsky has commented that Decadent canons are always seeking to venerate hybridity, whether cultural, formal, or linguistic (2013: 72). Naturalist approaches utilise

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<sup>245</sup> Acquisto describes it as "reflecting on [the two] as their mixtures trouble, but ultimately fascinate, the reader attuned to these juxtapositions" (Acquisto, 2007: 67).

modes of collection for linguistic creativity and documentary coverage, where Huysmans and others had taken inspiration from new technical glossaries (Finney, 1986: 73) - though Huysmans maintained an opulent style that kept him separate, using forms that even the experimental Goncourts found “extravagant” (Baldick, 1955: 61). Naturalism’s creative linguistic miscegenation is celebrated in *À rebours* in a number of citations found in the Latin library; particularly through the intertext of Apuleius. In the work of this Roman African author, the “tributary waters from every province” combine, becoming an “incredible torrent of words” (Huysmans, 1986: 31) which parallels the fast-developing French of Naturalism’s lexical collaging. Decadent collection in stylistic terms has its precursor in Naturalism, even if intertextual collage in the excessive forms found in *À rebours* are too artificial for Zola’s desire for immersive impressionism.

The acknowledgement of this debt is present in Des Esseintes’ descriptions of Apuleius, where the exuberant hybridity of this intertext depicts a time and place where multiculturalism’s impact on literary style and language is liberating. The Decadent theme of excess is relevant as a characterisation of the driving force which exceeds boundaries and generates the kind of hybridity found here. Hybridity requires the decay of boundaries, and in the conjunction between Naturalist linguistic collecting and collage, and Decadent excess and decay, a transgressive porosity nods towards the avant-garde tendencies which accompany and form a paradox with the Decadent backwards glance. Like Latin after the fourth century, which took on those richer flavours and scents, the “odour of Christianity” mixing with “the pagan tongue as it decomposed like venison, dropping to pieces” (Huysmans, 1956: 33), hybridity creates rich mixtures a long way from the frozen purity of medium specificity, as well as foregrounding style in its confusion of forms and modes.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Birkett has explored the way that hybridity foregrounds style in the work of Huysmans’ contemporary Péladan (1998: 850).

This was one of the aspects of cultural degeneracy condemned by Nisard and later Nordau, where the cultivation of “obscure idiolects” by Decadent and Naturalist writers was feared as a threat to the *‘langue nationale’*, as were formal experimentation and intermedial hybridity. In these tendencies, words were seen to become “dislocated from thought and feeling” when utilised for sonority or synaesthetic effect. According to the conservative commentators, this would result in form stifling content, and words becoming “malign” and destructive in their loosening from meaning via independence and amalgamative potential (North, 1999: 87). Huysmans has Des Esseintes equating “patriotism and poor literary judgment” (Potolsky, 2013: 70) in opposition to preservationists such as Nordau and *L'Académie française*, recognising the distorting and suspect moralistic framework often brought to bear upon ideas of innovative combination and change. Instead, intertexts are selected for their embodied hybridity (Potolsky, 2013: 86); the disintegration which brings change, and the recombination which brings invention.<sup>247</sup>

The mobilising and undermining of boundaries is central to Decadent writing (Constable, Denisoff, Potolsky, 1999: 21). Divided and separated forms, placed in contiguity (e.g. specialist terminological compendiums, or collected fragmentary adaptations), and subject to a tendency towards transgression via a thematic celebration of excess, create the potential for hybrid innovation. The boundaries between specialisations of language and form contribute to the richness of the forms themselves - boundaries that are known, but recognised as fluid through inherency, a recognition stimulated by analogical thinking. They are then more open to transgression through adaptation, intertextuality, and intermediality, creating a delight in impure forms that is present in Huysmans’ Decadent period, and builds on his Naturalist work.

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<sup>247</sup> Schober has written on the dynamism of established but fluid media, and the creative potential of boundaries (2013: 91) in this sense, where innovation is made possible by transgression.

In earlier texts such as *Le drageoir aux épices*, Huysmans had employed dense intertextual collages within an idiosyncratic, yet identifiably Naturalist framework, using the structure of a collection which was to recur in *À rebours*' surface fragments. The *drageoir* (the title itself indicating its status as container) is a collection of diverse literary styles, according to Acquisto (2007). The styles are explored through an architectural and geographical framework, and narratorial *flânerie*, an interesting counterpoint to the stasis of *Des Esseintes* in the novel of ten years later. This collection, arrangement, and exploration of literary as well as physical terrain through Naturalist style might be seen to be adapted in *À rebours* through a distortion of the Naturalist collecting framework, adding Decadent excess, and creating *À rebours*' Decadent intertextual style from an adapted Naturalism.

In the larger evolutionary adaptation of an aesthetic configuration formed from the conventions of his previous Naturalist work, the base structures of Huysmans' Decadent adaptations might be identified; as variations on the Naturalistic collections observed in *Le drageoir aux épices*. As in Ziegler's concept of the asymptote, it is possible to see this shift in Huysmans' adaptive style utilising Decadent excess as the flame needed to transmute Naturalism into something more innovative, and more personal. Huysmans finds the idiosyncratic style encapsulated in spiritual naturalism – an adapted Naturalism – and his Catholic novels through the catalyst of the Decadent *À rebours*, effecting a break from Zola's school through a purposefully unfaithful adaptation, "formalised" in the opening discussions of *Là-bas* (Ziegler, 2004: 27) after the experiments of *À rebours*. *À rebours* is an intermediary adaptation, a necessary step that brings iconoclastic infidelity to this source, before it can be adapted again into Huysmans' more stable and ontologically satisfying spiritual naturalism. Decadent style as conceived in *À rebours* has the necessary heat to twist the frame of Naturalism, so that it encompasses Huysmans' individuality, even if his Decadent style is not the final form for this.

Adaptation here is kindling for the Decadent fire under the alembic of Huysmans' writing, breaking from his affiliations with Zola by using distorted Naturalist techniques to represent inversions of its themes, thereby dealing the school "a blow from which it has never truly recovered" (Baldick, 1955: 257). Its substance is used against it, creating/defining the new progression for Huysmans that is the Decadent style of *À rebours*, a new artifice formed from the fragments of "materialist" Naturalism (Baldick, 1955: 257). In a collection like the Latin library micro-adaptation of Nisard, fragmentary adaptations evidence this shift in their structure as collection which, when read as a palimpsest with that of *Le drageoir aux épices*, suggests an adaptation of Naturalist conventions (the diverse and extensive collection) from Huysmans' previous work.

Some textual fragments,<sup>248</sup> or micro-adaptations, such as Petronius, can be read as acknowledgements for the broader adaptation of Naturalism through the framing devices of criticism and subject matter, becoming clearer windows onto the "conscious rebellion" (Finney, 1986: 71) against Zola, and Huysmans' former literary identity. The Naturalist container of adaptive fragments in the *drageoir* becomes a Decadent container of adaptive fragments in *À rebours*, and the shifts in style and self-reflexivity with regard to the evolving differences show a mode of exorcism that is the writer seeking his voice. By placing excessive force upon the substance of Naturalism, Huysmans creates an inverted Naturalism, a slice of non-life. Hence the stasis replacing *flânerie*, the suffocating interiority and subjectivity, the rejection of narrative, yet the retaining of much of Huysmans' style from his previous novels. This is especially the case with his earthy, embodied descriptions, which emerge particularly in Chapter Eight of *À rebours* when describing the hothouse flowers.<sup>249</sup>

Petronius is connected to modern Naturalism through the description of the writer as a "shrewd observer, a delicate analyst, a marvellous painter," who approaches the everyday

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<sup>248</sup> These are fragmentary in their compression by Huysmans into condensed versions of themselves glimpsed through overlaid criticism.

<sup>249</sup> See Chapter Five of this thesis.



life of Rome “with an entire lack of prejudice” (Huysmans, 1956: 29), evoking Zola’s removal of authorial personality,<sup>250</sup> documentarian method, and impressionistic description. The “extraordinary vigour and precise colouring, in a style that makes free of every dialect, that borrows expressions from all the languages imported into Rome” of this “realistic novel” would appear to be a celebration of the Naturalist method of Huysmans’ previous work and the writing of Zola. However, in the celebration of Petronius’ refusal to moralise in terms of the broader cultural context, in having no thought “of reforming or satirising society,” we may see a slight against Zola, whose work is underpinned by moral imperatives on this broad scale (Finney, 1986: 74).<sup>251</sup> It is an adaptation acknowledged by collections and intertexts on the surface of the text, and where the idea of adaptation also gets closer to the inherency of Decadence and Naturalism than many accounts of the relationship (Bernheimer, 2002: 58).

Instead of a meticulous observation of life or Nature, cataloguing in *À rebours* is taken beyond its logical conclusion, listing for listing’s sake. It is untied, an ending in itself. Zimm identifies a “deadening” accuracy in the accounts of the books which becomes “disruptive” to a sense of narrative flow (2004: 311), and this provides an example of the adaptive collections of Huysmans rupturing the surface of Naturalism’s immersive impressions to fragment the unity of the reader’s experience. Adaptation itself can be thought of as a rejection of the Naturalist method, where an immersive “imitation” was the aim for Zola (Finney, 1986: 71),<sup>252</sup> whilst adaptation seeks to alter with acknowledgement, allowing Huysmans to break

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<sup>250</sup> In Petronius there is no glimpse of the author according to Huysmans/Des Esseintes (1956: 31).

<sup>251</sup> Not in terms of judging characters, but in terms of reversing societal degeneration through its exposition in the ‘scientific’ novel. This was always a problem for Huysmans’ identification as a Naturalist, even in the articles published by *L’Actualité* under the title ‘Emile Zola et *L’Assommoir*,’ which were thought by many (including a pleased Zola) to represent one of the first important manifestoes of Naturalism. As Baldick says: “few of those who read it noticed that Huysmans paid no attention to Zola’s pseudo-scientific theories, and that the Naturalism which he advocated was nothing more than a ‘patient study of reality, an overall picture obtained by the observation of details’” (Baldick, 1955: 64-5). In this latter quotation from Huysmans’ articles, we can also see how going against reality and wholeness in favour of artifice and fragmentation could be key techniques for ‘adapting’ or inverting Naturalism.

<sup>252</sup> Ziegler also says that the Naturalist novel seeks to reflect the outside world (2004: 23).

with the anxiety of his primary influence; like the adaptation of Nature, acknowledgment and difference is constructed by the fragmentary surface.

In the Petronius intertext, itself a book of time-decayed fragments, Huysmans has Des Esseintes praise a literary container for a lexical and stylistic collection as he displays his own.<sup>253</sup> In *À rebours*, this is a more reflexive version of the technique than in previous works like the 1877 *Sac au dos* (2002), described in a review by Jean Richepin in terms of a “debauchery of style: rare substantives, strange epithets, unexpected fusions of words, archaisms and neologisms” (1880). This reflexivity is due to the acknowledgment of the technique via the discussion of the source that is being to some degree adapted, rather than merely utilising but obscuring the source. *Sac au dos* collects vocabularies, *Le drageoir aux épices* collects styles, and *À rebours* collects both, as well as collecting the texts that are some of the sources for these first two, establishing those lines of ancestry and layers of artifice. This actually allows for a bolder display of technique to the reader, and also draws a clearer adaptive link in the highlighting of its intertextuality. The tie between all of these modes is Huysmans’ method of collection as an intertextual version of Naturalism’s gathering of lexical sources.<sup>254</sup> In *À rebours*, the technique is made artificial in its literariness,<sup>255</sup> as well as excessive and reflexive.

The adaptation of Petronius might also be identified in other sections of the novel, such as the black banquet, a memory sequence where Des Esseintes recalls his period of theatrical mourning for his lost libido in a banquet which evokes Trimalchio even as it is described as an adaptation of “an eighteenth century original” (Huysmans, 1956: 13) - a memory of an adaptation.<sup>256</sup> In its display within the Latin library, the Petronius intertext demonstrates the

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<sup>253</sup> The novel as a “series of pastiches” (Wade, 1974: 380).

<sup>254</sup> Not necessarily an original addition, for Zola was also a keen adapter (Griffiths, 2009).

<sup>255</sup> Nature is deferred in artworks, not collected as impressions.

<sup>256</sup> The black banquet from his life at Lourps also shows an instance of adapting Nature prior to Fontenay, where the garden is “metamorphosed for the occasion, the paths being strewn with charcoal, the ornamental pond

adaptive collection of styles which is part of Huysmans' literary method, and a result of his Naturalist roots, where collection is important. However, he shows that he is adapting only fragments of this lineage (the container framework and techniques of cataloguing description), while creating a tension with modern Naturalism by praising in Petronius a lack of moral judgement. Huysmans uses the work as a foundation for the kind of adapted Naturalism he desires for *À rebours* - a new version of his own style.<sup>257</sup>

Collecting is important both within Huysmans' text, and in the museum-like interiors of Decadent homes. As the intertextuality of *À rebours* has been suggested to be on one level a collection of intermedial fragments which ornament the more extended adaptations,<sup>258</sup> the extra-textual collection practices of Huysmans have relevance for the intra-textual methods that constitute many of his adaptations, and those of his character. The collection practices of the nineteenth century have been well-documented,<sup>259</sup> with particularly useful emphasis on the conflation of the public museum space and the private spaces of the bourgeois home. The paradigmatic shifts that structure these arenas of collecting in the *fin de siècle* might also be seen to influence the adaptive practice of writers such as Huysmans.

Both Huysmans' novel and its subject work, Des Esseintes' house, adapt Nature and the past in the same way that a museum does, distilling the external world into representative objects, recontextualised. Ziegler says that for Huysmans, "before the world [...] there was the museum" (2004: 339), and *À rebours* resembles a museum too, in its notional *ekphrastic*

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edged with black basalt and filled with ink, and the shrubberies replanted with cypresses and pines" (Huysmans, 1956: 13).

<sup>257</sup> Huysmans' 1903 preface to the novel shows that much of his motivation to write it came through a sense that Naturalism and realism had been done too perfectly by Zola and Flaubert, and that for a young writer there was little scope to do anything new. He feared 'getting his pen trapped in the inkpot, and of having to stir up the same old ink for the rest of his life,' with Baldick saying that Huysmans wrote *À rebours* because he was "intensely dissatisfied with his earlier works" (1955: 119).

<sup>258</sup> Of Nature, whilst in other instances these citations are acknowledgements of extended adaptations like Baudelaire and Naturalism, the latter being more buried, yet perhaps more likely to be noted by *fin de siècle* readers aware of Huysmans' previous work.

<sup>259</sup> See Maleuvre (1999); Emery & Morowitz (2004); Ellicson (2012).

adaptation of the house into a further stylised version in literature, and its status as a container for adapted texts, micro-adapted texts, and other forms of intertextuality. The acknowledged fragments of citation are presented museologically, through a museum's "series of juxtaposed and interleaved spaces" (Preziosi, 2003: 81). The type of adaptation which collects these texts, which enacts recontextualisations and rearrangements, as well as the process of embedding texts in objects undertaken by Des Esseintes (and notionally by Huysmans), can be examined for its thematic associations, as well as its resonances for the culture of the *fin de siècle*, and conceptualised as a type, or types, of adaptation.

### Decadent Collections: The *Bibelot*

In diametrically opposing the "vast spaces" of Zola's novels, whilst retaining the connection in the "intricate detail" which remains, *À rebours'* spaces and objects, conceptualised as a museum, show the shift inward and the focus on the past rather than the present (or in the present).<sup>260</sup> The rise of collecting, display, and the pervasive spread of concepts related to the museum were an important development in the relationships between people, objects, and artworks in nineteenth-century Europe, which was "awash" (Potolsky, 2013: 74) with collections - a fact Potolsky identifies as being reflected in Decadent works.<sup>261</sup> Nordau also saw the passion for collecting as yet another symptom of degeneration (1895: 27). Decadent writers collect in their homes and their texts in order to take their place at the end of history, "sorting through the materials of the cultural past, collecting and arranging ostentatiously borrowed parts" (Potolsky, 2013: 73). Collections, like adaptations, are secondary, and both form and practice (Braddock, 2012: 5), and adaptation is a function

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<sup>260</sup> Griffiths identifies these key tropes of Zola's Naturalism (2013: 8).

<sup>261</sup> Ivory says that "the strategy of accumulating, appropriating, and repurposing objects and ideas could be seen as a hallmark of Decadence itself: Decadent authors complicate, adorn, and rearrange that which is spatially or chronologically remote, in order to suit an (often fleeting) present or proximate purpose" (2016: 106).

which allows precisely this sorting and re-arranging of the cultural past. In the structure of adapting Nature, adaptation is a method of textual collection in *À rebours* - both for the novel in its *ekphrasis*, and the house-text which it presents, particularly in the intertextual surface of acknowledged fragments, and its smaller collections. Some authors (e.g. Emery & Morowitz, 2004) chart a phenomenon of 'museumification' in the centrality of the museum to the *fin de siècle*,<sup>262</sup> and this suggests the idea of Huysmans' adaptations being influenced by changing modes of experiencing and representing information, and new mobilities of artefacts and texts.

The museum, as arena for staging the relationships between past and present, sacred and profane, authentic and reproduced, becomes a framework as well as an architectural space in its use by Huysmans. The framework is adaptable, a meaningful configuration mapping onto and changing other spaces, such as the domestic interior within the narrative, or the novel itself as a container for collections. Texts like *À rebours*, which create a literary museum space, utilise the changing dynamics inherent to this framework in the *fin de siècle* in order to configure and represent objects and texts in new ways.

The idea of the museum as a medium<sup>263</sup> whose formal structures might be intermedially adapted is important to the framing of intertextual relationships in *À rebours*, including modes of adaptation. Huysmans uses the museum as a medium of representation with its own formal attributes and conventions that can be adapted to shape writing practice, an intermedial meta-adaptation which frames the honeycombing of collections of fragments. Indeed, this does more than frame the citations of adaptations like Baudelaire and Naturalism; it actually defines their structural characteristics, where museological methods and principles are mapped onto creative practice directly or subliminally.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> Maleuvre sees interiors as becoming private museums in the nineteenth century (1999: 115), as practices of collection became democratised to morph dwelling into a kind of displayed ownership.

<sup>263</sup> See Putnam (2001); Henning (2006).

<sup>264</sup> Putnam has explored the way that creative practice is influenced by museum culture (2001: 34).

The changes effected by the collections that place objects and texts together in the museum (novel/house) are subtle, but may be understood as adaptations due to the shifts that are present in the mobilising and recontextualising. This also comes through the critical delineating and guiding effected by the character's framing thoughts, and the resonances with other presences via juxtapositions. Whether in a novel or a domestic space they can be seen to function using the same methods as museum collections, where the de- and re-contextualisations make a thing into an object (Henning, 2006: 99), and in the textual version make sources into adaptations.

Lists themselves forge a relationship between texts and objects, words and things (Mills, 2010: 155), and this aspect of Decadent style<sup>265</sup> allows for a closer relationship between adaptation and curation. However, for fragmentary or micro-adaptation to work in *À rebours*, the mediating text of the museum framework is required, for in its medium-specificity it is able to collect the multiple fragments of intertextual citation in a recombinative curatorial whole for the reader, where the collection becomes a mosaic-text of multiple fragments. It is an architectural framework of associations which becomes a mediated/mediating text, a pre-textual, generalised<sup>266</sup> structure which is then adapted to become part of the novel's conceptual architecture. It is extensive, though the ideas of purpose and acknowledgement are somewhat muddled.

The museum of *À rebours* is actually more progressive and modern in its methods than most conventional museums of the period; particularly in the Baudelairean concentration on *correspondences* and other networks of resonance rather than linear historicity.<sup>267</sup> The fact that its organisation is based around chapters which group via interpretative and thematic frameworks is more akin to modern art galleries than *fin de siècle* museums. Alongside the

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<sup>265</sup> As noted, part of its relationship to Naturalism.

<sup>266</sup> Aspects of the museum as media type, rather than one specific museum.

<sup>267</sup> Henning says that interconnectedness and *correspondences* define modern museum spaces (2006: 149).

diverse intermediality of the collections, the adaptation of the museum framework shows Huysmans participating in a new confluence between museum and home that went beyond the conventions of either; indeed, coming closer to twenty-first century virtual museums of what Henning terms “personal obsessions” (2006: 154). The mode of reading present in collections has also been posited as a new development in the nineteenth century. Grotta analyses Baudelaire’s incorporation of newspaper aesthetics,<sup>268</sup> as creating a flickering reading gaze that echoes that of the *flâneur* in the street (2015: 26-30). This new form of reading between networks of fragments might be seen in *À rebours*’ adaptations, where the structure of the palimpsestuous mosaic relies on this same new mode of curatorial reading.

Huysmans’ museum looks ahead to the rise of curation more than it looks back at the nineteenth century’s museums, and indeed the development of curation and adaptation as important creative practices and formalised concepts at similar times in the early twentieth century is unlikely to be a historical coincidence.<sup>269</sup> Adaptation might also be argued to engage with ideas around the “fitting together of pieces” and the “interrelation of planes,”<sup>270</sup> and both require similar Modernist reading modes from their audiences. The increasing prevalence of curation as a means of sorting information, which began in the nineteenth century (Bhaskar, 2016: 10), suggests its relevance to more than just museum practice. Its importance to Modernist aesthetics provides a link between the structures and processes of transposition in *À rebours*, and Huysmans’ status as Modernist precursor (Weir, 1995).<sup>271</sup>

Homes also change as part of this alteration of concepts connected to objects and their display, benefitting from and reproducing the tensions between the artistic and consumerist

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<sup>268</sup> Which resemble Modernist aesthetics in their juxtaposition of unconnected texts.

<sup>269</sup> Adaptations allow audiences to encounter new versions of “originals” in new spaces under new contexts, as do mechanical reproductions (Jellenik, 2017: 49), with curation relying on similar shifts in objecthood and Romantic notions of originality.

<sup>270</sup> Phrases used by Brennan to define curatorial practices (2010: 209).

<sup>271</sup> For Balas, Modernism is considered a fulfilment of ideals evoked by Decadence (2015).

artefact.<sup>272</sup> The conflation of display spaces must certainly be read alongside the rise of reproductions, where “boundaries between the display practices of department store, museum, cabinet of curiosities and bourgeois interior had blurred if not altogether disappeared” (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 300) by the end of the nineteenth century. In this formulation, the space of the home becomes a centre of private collecting practices between the public spaces of the museum and the shop. This is an overlapping partially built upon the eighteenth century *wunderkammer* obsession that has shaped the modern worldview according to Bhaskar (2016; 300), a thread of elitism within collection that sees the practice as a mode of displaying taste, further fetishising the object, yet shifting in the *fin de siècle* due to the rise of the moneyed bourgeoisie.<sup>273</sup>

The relating of the character’s taste is a key idea in *À rebours*.<sup>274</sup> It contributes to the construction of a self via attachments to texts and objects, or a Decadent archetype through previous works, with Porter noting the importance of *mise-en-abyme* in the novel, and other Decadent works, where texts are cited which function as versions of the novel itself (1978: 188-200). Des Esseintes is often at his most emotive and expressive when arguing within the “passionate relationship” (Zimm, 2004: 311) between himself and his library,<sup>275</sup> a taste-structured relationship itself taken from a key intertext for *À rebours* and its house-text of adapted fragments: Edmond de Goncourt’s *La Maison d’un artiste* (1880).

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<sup>272</sup> The idea of the museum aesthetic spreading into other areas of cultural life is evoked in concepts such as Eagleton’s view of the fetishised shop object as a “grisly caricature” (1990: 209) of the museum or gallery aesthetic object. Caricature is predicated on adaptive interactions with a source, while this link also invokes themes of aura and consumption; where the merging of aesthetic experience in galleries and museums with the commodity aesthetics of the department store (Henning, 2006: 29) presents, from an Aestheticist perspective, a kind of profanation of sacred spaces.

<sup>273</sup> “The result of [whose] rise to power had been the suppression of all intelligence, the negation of all honesty, the destruction of all art [...] a deluge of lifeless inanities [...] a torrent of hackneyed phrases and conventional ideas” (Huysmans, 1956: 203).

<sup>274</sup> In the Latin library, “many are called, few are chosen” (Zimm, 2004: 312).

<sup>275</sup> Echoing Baudrillard’s idea that the gathering of objects is a process of narcissistic projection (1994: 91).



Taste is the mobilising force of Des Esseintes' collection-texts of fragments which make up his adaptation of Nature; it is the gravity which draws texts and objects into the adaptive orbit of the museum. Benjamin sees taste as being granted free rein by the Aestheticist doctrines, where for the first time it was given "a dominant position in poetry" (Benjamin, 2006: 132), and hence also in structuring the relationship between a work and other works. Within literature, taste prompted the individual writer to collect a personal archive, to create subjective libraries or galleries, and when these are then represented, to create *ekphrases* full of fragmentary and synecdochical intertexts, frequently intermedial. It is one of the engines driving the adaptations in *À rebours*, where collections are signifiers of a perverse taste, so that adaptations become symptoms of Des Esseintes' refined malady.

Benjamin sees taste as meaning that for the first time, the writer "faces language the way the buyer faces the commodity on the open market" (2006: 132), and it is this same mobilising element of taste that creates the drive towards the kind of adaptation undertaken in *À rebours*. It is perhaps the element of acquisition present in both adaptive collection and marketplace accumulation, highlighted by Benjamin, which might be seen as the source of tensions present in the adaptations of *À rebours*. Perhaps without the changes in the culture of commodities, adaptation in a Decadent novel such as *À rebours* could not have had such curatorial dynamism.

The museum aesthetic is also one which mobilises, being predicated on fragmentation and recontextualisation, where objects are removed as a fragment from an original context and situated anew. In the public space, collections of synecdoches for complex historical signifieds developed alongside photography, realism, and Naturalism in the second half of the nineteenth century, addressing "a mass audience that had become accustomed to finding fragments of reality far removed from their original spatial and temporal context" (Henning, 2006: 52). The mobility of symbolic fragments, which become windows onto larger 'texts' through new readings directed by fresh contexts, suggests relevance for fragmentary

adaptations within ‘container’ texts, or mosaic texts defined by their collectivisation of intertexts mediating the adaptation of the source into this fragmented version.

Changing modes of reading, exemplified in museum aesthetics which then spread to become home aesthetics, might also be seen to have seeped into the adaptive poetics of authors such as Huysmans. New interpretive strategies in relation to symbolic objects that carry a broader, ‘narrative’ signified could impact upon the replication of museum aesthetics in texts utilising adaptation, *mise-en-abyme*, and other modes of intertextuality. They allow fragmentary collections of intertexts to exist fully as adaptations,<sup>276</sup> in their ability to be read across parts and between contexts.

Adaptive vestiges negotiate specific versions of personal pasts, as in the example of Huysmans’ relationship to Naturalism, and the *bibelot* as a new version of objecthood within “interiors increasingly conceived as private museums” (Maleuvre, 1999: 115) is an important locus of concepts relating to vestigial pasts. The *bibelot* is a collector’s piece “distinguished from earlier collectable items by [its] central qualities of gratuitousness and mobility” (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 286), and not reliant on the authenticity of previous collectables, frequently being reproductions. Technological reproduction allows for an increase in ‘play’ when it comes to artworks (Grotta, 2015: 18), for both producers and recipients, with play being a useful concept for considering adaptation’s mobilisation of texts, and the culture of the *bibelot* bringing these ideas of rearrangement to the fore in the *fin de siècle*.

The *bibelot* has a clear link to adaptation in its quality of ‘derivation’ (Maleuvre, 1999: 119), and as with adaptations and their own structures of derivation, there are clear value judgements attached to these kinds of interrelationships. There is a sense that due to the proliferation of the museum aesthetic, “serious scholarship and private collecting overlapped at the end of the nineteenth century” (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 286); possibly also as a re-

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<sup>276</sup> i.e. the collected fragments of Nature, Naturalism’s conventions, or a Baudelairean heterocosm, adapted as single sources of collected textual fragments.

inscription in response to the “democratisation” of collecting (Saisselin, 1984: 72), a way to mark off ‘legitimate’ and ‘mass’ modes of approach. This worked to mark certain texts with higher culture imprimaturs, keeping them separate from the ‘pulpy’ modes.<sup>277</sup> Shifts which married criticality and collection, both in objects and textual forms, have clear parallels in the types of adaptation which utilise a fragmented intertextuality that can be seen in *À rebours*.

Seeing in the growing ubiquity of *bibelots* a commodification of collecting practice and ‘cheapening’ of the museum, Huysmans chose to define his collecting practices against those associated with this new objecthood (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 293). Other authors associated with Decadent literature were similarly oriented, with the Goncourts writing in their journal that collecting is a vulgarisation of the artwork or object when taken up by the masses (Pety, 2003: 83). Huysmans was not a collector of *bibelots*, but of artefacts. However, he cannot fail to have been affected by this shift - even in his opposition to it.

There is perhaps a hint that the fragmentary nature of *À rebours*’ intertextual surface, which features second-hand sources not necessarily known in depth,<sup>278</sup> represents a similar kind of amassing to the culture of *bibelots*. Both are predicated on a similar sense of display based on vanity and a desire to demonstrate class; Huysmans is an aristocrat in his mind, for intellect and taste are the measures for him, rather than wealth. Aside from the relevance for projects of artifice, the collected surface of the adaptations present in *À rebours*, that seem to confer an intellectual aristocracy, are analogous to the *bibelots* of the bourgeoisie.

Maleuvre sees the *bibelot* as having an inadvertent infidelity, of being “untrue to its origins” (1999: 119) and failing in its goal of historical mimesis. With *À rebours*’ textual *bibelots* - the collections of intertexts - it could be seen that Huysmans makes this a virtue, sublimates this seeming fault by bringing excess to the infidelity present in the adaptive

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<sup>277</sup> Such as the *feuilleton*, the serial genre of popular literature that had featured in newspapers since its invention with the launch of *La Presse* in 1836 (Grotta, 2015: 24). Indeed, *the fin de siècle* sees the development of notions of high and low culture alongside the modern press and publishing industry (Marshall, 2007: 3).

<sup>278</sup> e.g. the Latin library’s appropriation of Nisard.

model of the *bibelot*, and turning objectified reproduction into textual micro-adaptation. Through the introduction of increased creative agency and critical interpretation into intertextual *bibelots*, he turns inadvertent infidelity into wilful artifice, controlling this aspect creatively. However, it is in another, more tactile aspect of their use that the culture of the *bibelot* could be seen to have unconsciously structured Huysmans' collections within the museological novel. This aspect is in their mobility.<sup>279</sup>

Huysmans' intertextuality in *Le drageoir aux épices* is a mode of collecting seemingly structured both by his adaptation of his previous Naturalist techniques, and by adaptations of Baudelaire, as it is characterised by or figured in terms of *flânerie* (Acquisto, 2007: 65). This individual mode of urban mobility was in fact described by Walter Benjamin in the context of a new mode of collecting which emerged in the nineteenth century, a method of collecting which is de-objectified (or de-textualised). The *flâneur* is a moving collector of experiences,<sup>280</sup> an Aestheticist version of the consumer whose *bibelots* are impressions and images, and a model for the adaptation of collections of fragments, in both Naturalism,<sup>281</sup> and in Decadent canon-formation.

In this figure, the adapter/collector is in motion; but adapted texts themselves are also predicated on a notion of textual mobility that allows for constant cycles of de-contextualisation/re-contextualisation/display.<sup>282</sup> Prior to the rise of 'museumification,' its democratisation by consumerism, and the freeing of the object from context in the craze for *bibelots*, it is far more of an intellectual leap to move from one adaptive paradigm to another. Namely; from a text that engages in a traditional sustained adaptation relationship with a

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<sup>279</sup> Jellenik has noted that textual mobility emerges as a possible reflection of social mobility (2017: 50).

<sup>280</sup> As in Baudelaire's 1863 example of Guys (1992).

<sup>281</sup> Whose key influencing topics were urban exploration and heredity (Luckhurst and Ledger, 2000: xvi).

<sup>282</sup> This latter part an optional actualisation in form.

fidelity approach to sanctified originals,<sup>283</sup> to a text that collects other texts to display a self-reflexive surface, mereologically Decadent in its cult of detail.<sup>284</sup> The rise of the *bibelot* might be seen to encourage the detachability of contexts, as well as highlighting the ideas of collections as fragmentary, hybrid, and based around *correspondences* - rather than a historiographical linearity, or fidelity to a period or representative depiction.

The detachability encouraged by the *bibelot* means that the museum artefact becomes accessible, mobile, and open to new contextual relations when set within the altered spaces of personal museums, prompting the rise of public and personal curatorship.<sup>285</sup> In this, the outward self, and experience of the world are fragmented, selected, and refined so that unique fragments can give meaning to the whole they are drawn from (Bhaskar, 2016: 281). It could also be argued that the textual universe might take on similar ideas. Whilst the narrator/author of *Le drageoir aux épices* is an adapter based on the collections of *flânerie*, in *À rebours*, Huysmans depicts Des Esseintes as a collector who does not need to move,<sup>286</sup> for he has embedded the world as fragments within the home and the memory, as a museum distils the past, with objects delineating temporal layers.

*Flânerie* in *À rebours* is deferred onto the spectatorial position, rather than the narrating one, and Des Esseintes is a memorial *flâneur* rather than a physical one; a director of collections. Des Esseintes renounces the *flâneur* model of adaptive collecting in favour of a

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<sup>283</sup> The approach Jellenik allies with Romanticist doctrines of originality and authenticity (2017), which are being rejected in Decadent works, which perhaps lay the groundwork for more Modernist approaches of bricolage.

<sup>284</sup> With some of these fragments being citations which signify extended adaptations, while others are micro-adaptations, collections within the whole are micro-adaptations, and all contribute to an adaptation of a heterocosm of the Nature-source which is adapted as and to collections of textual fragments at varying stages of artifice.

<sup>285</sup> For Emery and Morowitz “de-contextualisation and re-assembly is one of the defining characteristics of both public and private collections” (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 302).

<sup>286</sup> The narrative itself does have some degree of movement, following a “chronological description of space” which is actually a revelation of the creative process that has formed the text of the house, since it progresses in “the order of creation, implying the sense of time” and the artistic development of the architextual/novelistic work (Zimm, 2004: 308). This narrative motion therefore functions for the reader in a similar manner to an adaptation, in that it depicts to some degree the process of the text’s construction, prompting a reflexivity in its audience, who glimpse the artifice in the “gap in which we can see the act of making fiction” (Geraghty, 2008: 5).

more artificial mode which defers reality.<sup>287</sup> The culture of the *bibelot* allows this shift in approach, as it emphasises the mobility of diverse objects and their decontextualisations, allowing a regression in the required mobility of the adapter, a Decadent inversion which accentuates artifice and rejects the Naturalist engagement with Nature.

The *bibelot* and the home museum as model would additionally seem to encourage the intermedial hybridity that is seen in *À rebours*' collections,<sup>288</sup> as opposed to the *drageoir*'s monomediality in terms of collecting only literary styles. A clear progression is evident in the more fragmented and intermedial intertextual collections of *À rebours*, and their utilisation of adaptations in terms of extension and change, compared to the more measured and separate ones of *Le drageoir aux épices*.<sup>289</sup> This is seen not only in the multiplicity of media for collection, but also in the way that resonances of analogy make the boundaries between the collections of *À rebours* porous, corrupting medium specificity.<sup>290</sup> The influence of the home museum and the *bibelot* might be seen to seep into the intertextuality and adaptations of *À rebours*, where the mode of collecting changes from Huysmans' previous practice, as part of an adaptation of literary approach that is an evolution. Not only does textual mobility accelerate to emphasise *correspondence* thinking, the collector's mobility decreases as part of a move away from Naturalism into artifice. However, with this motion, authorship actually increases in the figure of Des Esseintes, suggesting a refinement of the figures for adaptation which have been under discussion.

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<sup>287</sup> Very much along the famous line from *Axël*: "Living? Our servants will do that for us" (de l'Isle-Adam, 1894: 260)

<sup>288</sup> A hybridity noted by Potolsky (2013: 90).

<sup>289</sup> Though the *drageoir* does not have the collected intertexts encrusting a sustained adaptation of a textualised Nature.

<sup>290</sup> For example, Balzac, Gautier, and Hugo appear amongst the perfumes (Huysmans, 1956: 107), while Baudelaire (1956: 56), Poe (1956: 60) and discussions of interior furnishing make their presence felt alongside Moreau (1956: 61-63).

## Curating/Adapting

Moving from the intra-textual influence of the *bibelot* to more material collecting identifies another adaptive locus for Huysmans' break from Naturalism.<sup>291</sup> Prior to becoming associated with mass production and the bourgeoisie, the *bibelot* embodied those ideas of "superfluity and anti-utilitarianism" (Watson, 2000: 19) which were central to the Aestheticist impulse within Decadent novels such as *À rebours*. More closely linked to the museum than the shop at this earlier stage, the *bibelot's* ornamental nature seemed to embody principles of collection suited to Huysmans. However, as the culture of collection associated with the *bibelot* became one of "stereotypical" bourgeois décor, a "re-appropriation" was required, one that was again based on a Baudelairean concept, structured as it was by the "plays of distinction embraced by Dandyism" (Watson, 2000: 19). This brings the "eye for nuance" (2000: 20) and erudition of choice back into play, recalling the selection of precursors in the Latin library, with its sense of measured selectivity.<sup>292</sup>

Watson sees the *bibelot* in its early - and later re-appropriated incarnation - as being embraced by Decadence for its "rarity, luxury, and artificiality" (2000: 20), as well as being a way to participate in the accelerating consumer culture 'tastefully.' This early stage of acceptance may have been the period where aspects of the new versions of collecting that were relevant to adaptation were internalised by those such as Huysmans, prior to the democratisation of the practice and the subsequent modulations made to his participation in it. It is in this subsequent rejection of the *bibelot* culture, via a redefinition of his own practice of collection, that Huysmans again sought to separate himself from both Naturalism and mass

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<sup>291</sup> Lyytikäinen has analysed Kilpi's *Antinous* (1903) as also portraying the "denizen of an ideal world beyond Naturalism" (2016: 21), showing that after Huysmans' more personal engagement, this extant form became a key source text for subsequent Decadent stylists.

<sup>292</sup> An idea even more evident in the book collection as a whole across the three libraries (the Latin, the sacred and profane, the modern) in Des Esseintes' house, where after the Latin authors his collection makes "a prodigious jump of several centuries [...] without regard to the intermediate ages" to contemporary French authors (Huysmans, 1956: 39).

culture, and where his adaptations (as textual analogue for collection) also take on a different timbre to the collection practices of the majority.

This difference is crystallised most effectively in the comparisons between Zola and Huysmans, where the latter often derided his former mentor for his obsessive collection of *bibelots* without knowledge as to their provenance (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 302), and his inability to distinguish between ‘authentic’ objects and reproductions. This has echoes of a fidelity discourse, and the sanctification of aura. Much of the disapproval stemmed from the participation in the bourgeois consumer culture that mass collecting, rather than rarefied collecting, seemed to insinuate. The distinction was translated to literature too, where the cataloguing of Zola’s novels is likely to include the whole gamut of physical phenomena in a given environment,<sup>293</sup> a density<sup>294</sup> of collected experiences from an elided *flâneur*.<sup>295</sup> Conversely, the lists of Huysmans’ *À rebours* are intensely selective, and his anti-*flâneur* is inescapable in his authorship.

Des Esseintes’ catalogues focus on rare types of phenomena categorised rigidly and accompanied by commentaries explaining provenance and justifying choice. Zola’s are piled onto the reader in a dense swarm of realist depiction. Their accumulation is a concentration on the effect of the whole constituted by parts whereas Huysmans’ in *À rebours* is a compendium of parts that remain fragmented; the gaps in the image are venerated, for they imply the erudition of selectivity.<sup>296</sup> Perhaps at this juncture in their relationship, Huysmans associated the Naturalist collecting of the sources of Nature with the bourgeois, consumerist

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<sup>293</sup> An interesting comparison can be traced between the description of the fallen Eden of the garden in Zola’s *The Sin of Abbe Mouret* (2017) and the hothouse chapter of *À rebours*. Both are intensely excessive and dense, but Zola’s build Impressionistic totalities, whereas Huysmans’ place a magnifying glass on an extremely curated source.

<sup>294</sup> Ziegler calls this a “heavy, confused reality” (2004: 33).

<sup>295</sup> Zola’s concept of impartiality (discussed in Borghart (2007: 219)) advocated an “ideological neutrality” that makes the artist invisible (Ziegler, 2004: 20).

<sup>296</sup> Leitch has described a curatorial mode of adaptation as a celebration preserving its source faithfully (2007: 96). However, recontextualisation and juxtaposition would appear to disturb this fidelity impulse.



collecting of *bibelots* to which Zola had fallen prey in his home.<sup>297</sup> Again, textual form might be seen to reflect or draw from collection practices; in *À rebours*, both are marked by a differentiation from the amassing of Naturalism, with the alteration of method being a way in which Naturalism is adapted and transcended, as acknowledged by surface intertexts such as Petronius.

Huysmans and others maintained their own superiority in the face of mass participation in collecting “by proposing new definitions of [the] good and bad collector” (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 302). These redefinitions narrowed the acceptable mode in the eyes of Huysmans and Decadent collectors so that “by the end of the nineteenth century, to be considered a good collector one could no longer simply amass eclectic and rare objects” (2004: 302) in the manner of Zola. Instead, choices had to be justified through scholarship, taste, passion; a shift clearly evident in *À rebours*. This thread of erudition in collecting and in the arts which utilised modes of collection might be one of the defining characteristics of the *fin de siècle*. In this, the frequently bemoaned lack of a central stylistic tendency in the arts of the century is actually replaced by the “recycling of past styles” (Watson, 2000: 21); hinting at the importance of adaptation beyond the confines of *À rebours*. This nostalgic recycling, which might be traced as a significant antecedent tendency to adaptation in the early twentieth century, is predicated on that aforementioned desire to express taste, and also the “antiquarian’s love of erudition” (Watson, 2000: 21).

Even if compared to a structurally similar novel such as Goncourt’s *La Maison d’artiste*, the cataloguing of *À rebours* is rigorously taxonomical. The collections of *À rebours*, moving with the shifts in *biblot* culture for *fin de siècle* aesthetes wishing to distinguish themselves from the new bourgeois collectors, signify a change in the philosophies of collecting that can be identified as a move from collection to curation. This shift might be traced in the parallel differences in adaptation, a textual version of collection and recycling in its formation of the

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<sup>297</sup> The accumulation of *bibelots* noted by Emery & Morowitz (2004: 302).

exposed intertextual surface, between *Le drageoir aux épices* and *À rebours*.<sup>298</sup>

Des Esseintes' collections are as much about the rejections as about what is included. If the *drageoir* sees Huysmans collecting within a Naturalist framework, then *À rebours*' intertextuality can be seen to be structured around a framework of curatorship that is central to Decadent adaptation. The shift from collection to curation is therefore not only a mode of distancing from mass culture, but also from Naturalism. In his home(s), and in his intertextual approaches which include adaptation, Huysmans uses the selectivity of curation as an adaptation of Naturalism's collections which distances his practice from his previous literary identity. In curatorial modes<sup>299</sup> surety of taste and scholarly or creative analogy between parts are more important than any striving towards depicting a whole. The shift in intertextual style from the *drageoir* to *À rebours* might mirror domestic collecting culture, utilising influences from *bibelots* for the intertextual collections in *À rebours* which are and contain adaptations. It might be read as a rejection of the Naturalist project to collect and represent the world as experienced, in favour of a mosaic of artificial fragments, with their definitive omissions signifying the authorship of artifice.

In the curation of intertexts embedded in narrative objects in (and on the surface of) his museum *ekphrasis*, Huysmans was again adapting a technique of his Naturalist past to exorcise this element of self, very much utilising adaptation as a tool (the adaptation of a collecting methodology, itself a mode of adaptation) in line with the asymptotic view of Decadent novels. The idea of *À rebours* as an alembic recurs, within which Huysmans distils Naturalism into his personal style of spiritual naturalism. The location of this aesthetic in his work, textualised and dramatised, also links Huysmans to Modernist works from the next century, where the "collecting aesthetic" becomes a "paradigmatic" form (Braddock, 2012: 2).

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<sup>298</sup> This is especially relevant for a teleological line leading to Modernist practice, where curation as textual method equates to montage, a central intermedial Modernist feature (Elliott, 2003: 123), and collage, becoming the operative mode of intertextuality (Sanders, 2005: 7), and seen in nascent forms in *À rebours*.

<sup>299</sup> It is worth commenting that again, both adaptation and curation are second-order practices. Bhaskar notes this in the case of curation (2016: 300).

The distinction between curatorship and collecting evident in Zola and Huysmans' personal homes is translated to literature, defining *À rebours*' approach to adaptations. It is a distancing via an adaptation of a style of adaptation.

The Decadence of *À rebours* defines itself in many ways against Naturalism, with one significant contribution being its relationships with other texts via adaptations, adaptations structured on a framework of curatorship, a mobility of things that have been freed by shifts in cultures of collecting such as the *bibelot*. It is the distinction between accumulation and curatorship that makes adaptation all the more important for *À rebours*' idiosyncratic textual identity. Decadence in *À rebours* is partly the rejection of Naturalism's verisimilitude, the alteration of Nature rather than the mirroring.<sup>300</sup>

If Zola collects in his house and in his texts as an approach to the sources of Nature, Huysmans uses this as itself a source. Huysmans adapts this configuration from collection to curatorship in home and novel, where the Decadent approach to a fragmented source text from Nature (including other texts) is adapted via selectivity and rearrangement, heightening artifices of authorship. Curation is the model for the structure of the adaptation of Nature's fragmentary mosaic in *À rebours*, and as depicted in its narrative. This form of adaptation as curation is utilised by Huysmans because it is both a distancing from mass collecting cultures,<sup>301</sup> and from Zola's Naturalism. It adapts the Naturalist approach into an artificial Decadent version in order to break the anxiety of influence. This adaptation might be read as acknowledged in the Petronius intertext, itself part of the intertextuality which is structured by this approach. Adaptation in *À rebours* is a mode of curatorship which is itself an adaptation of Naturalism.

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<sup>300</sup> The "undistorted reflection" noted by Ziegler (2004: 17). The change can perhaps be traced to Flaubert's criticism of Huysmans' Naturalist work *Les sœurs Vatard* on the grounds that it was too mimetic and failed to distort enough. Antosh notes that after this comment, Huysmans' novels show a marked shift from the outer to the inner (1986: 24-5).

<sup>301</sup> Despite earlier influence from the *bibelot* and some degree of re-appropriation of these ideas in curatorship.

### Decadent Curation/Adaptation as the Shoring of Fragments

There are additional resonances suggesting the importance of curatorship for Huysmans, some of which are effectively unpacked through the allegory which is Des Esseintes' narrative *diegesis*. Benjamin, who defined himself as a "genuine collector" (1968: 59), as Huysmans might well have done, describes the collection of books in the short piece 'Unpacking My Library' as "a disorder to which habit has accommodated itself to such an extent that it can appear as order" (1968: 60). This statement echoes concerns relevant to Huysmans, particularly in the idea of the collector's impulse as stemming from a desire to create an artificial order, a personal bulwark against entropic disorder, just as individual museum vitrines seek to "suspend time" and arrest decomposition (Putnam, 2001: 15). The curator's impulse is a more intense version of the collector's, where with more agency comes a more rigorous and more artificial pattern, a heightened degree of order.

However, Benjamin's statement does more than imply a creative motive, for the collection is not an order drawn from disorder, but actually an appearance of order. It is only made manifest through the subjective reception of the collector-audience,<sup>302</sup> or a reflexive audience who are aware of the collection's nature as collection. It is an illusion of order constructed by a curator who arranges an artificial simulation of order which is latent. The collection becomes a text which can be read as a whole across its parts,<sup>303</sup> but only by a reader aware of the nature of its textuality.<sup>304</sup> Once the awareness of its status as collection is present, the audience can read it as a whole, interpreting its presences and absences, and the mosaic as an expression of a creating personality. The individual, fragmentary texts are

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<sup>302</sup> A unified figure like Des Esseintes, more prevalent now (Bhaskar, 2016: 302) than in Huysmans' time.

<sup>303</sup> Baudrillard says that the collection of objects creates a total meaning through the relative meanings between its individual parts (1994).

<sup>304</sup> This is the framework for the adaptation of Nature and its intertextual surface of mediating sources, and for the heterocosm.

adapted via reception into a larger text when the collection is acknowledged and activated.<sup>305</sup>

Des Esseintes demonstrates the adaptive curation of fragments in his retreat, in a *mise-en-abyme* representation of his creator's project of Decadent style which creates *À rebours*. In the house which adapts the world into objectified texts, where Huysmans surrounds the character with the materialised intertextuality of the novel, smaller collections like the Baudelaire tableau sit alongside or within larger ones like the Latin library, in a Chinese box structure of curated collections forming the adaptation of Nature. The contents of the house are given their order for the reader and revealed as a curation/adaptation by the revelation of process, achieved via insight into the character's mind. It is also encouraged by the foregrounding of so much of the textual artifice of the novel itself.

The order of the collection is an illusory whole-text, but a semblance which becomes a more concrete simulation for the author/audience by the thickening of its lines through the obsessive redrawing of what Benjamin notes as 'habit.' The act of collection - or adaptation - alone is not a bestowal of order upon disorder, but a construction of a latent potential order that may be activated by familiarity and repetition. The more familiar with our collection we are, the more rigorous its taxonomy appears. The more familiar with source texts and processes in an adaptation we are, the more evocative its *correspondences* of meaning are for us. The collection as a single ordered system, beyond just the literal grouping of its parts, is an ephemerality, as are adaptations. Both require an activating knowledge that restructures parts into a more meaningful palimpsestuous order.<sup>306</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> This recalls Potolsky's view of the Decadent text as examining canonicity via creating its own self-reflexive canon, with emphasis on reception in the process of canonisation. In this reading, the themes, styles, etc. of Decadence are not inherent to other texts, but become recognised by "selection and juxtaposition," and by being subsequently read within the context of the new canon (2013: 78). Potolsky sees much of Decadent subversive politics in the examination of canon formation, with the canon as a collection which has then concealed its origins, yet remained self-reflexive in form to highlight process.

<sup>306</sup> Seeming to resolve Hutcheon's reservations regarding museum exhibitions (collections) as being adaptations (2006: 172), which accepted that "a museum exhibit takes material objects from the past and recontextualises them within a historical narrative. Arguably, it is an extended interpretive and creative engagement with a past history," but Hutcheon retained doubts as to whether the audience experiences the collection as a palimpsest.

The collection is a text itself, an idea made evident in the way that Des Esseintes' library is tellingly turned into a "bound volume" (Donato, 2004: 117) by the décor of "crushed morocco" (Huysmans, 1884: 16) leather walls.<sup>307</sup> Habit imposes the illusion, holding the fragments together,<sup>308</sup> working as ritual to create an illusory structure for the participant.<sup>309</sup> The ritualised reception of Des Esseintes' experiments and amusements in *À rebours* works to reinforce this sense of an ordered space, and one which is an adaptation of fragments into an atemporal simulation, the stylised order of artifice.

Curation tries to hold an edited past in the present, to maintain an illusion of time that stretches beyond the life of the individual. The time of the self - memory - is a relevant consideration to ideas of personal museums and their collections. Two conflicting modernities in the nineteenth century have been characterised temporally: bourgeois modernity and aesthetic modernity.<sup>310</sup> Curation and adaptation become tools for the individual seeking to transcend bourgeois time, for they draw a mediated, controlled version of the past into the present, dreaming and remembering the world and therefore disrupting and rendering porous the boundaries of the present. Des Esseintes seeks a "pure aesthetic temporality" (Donato, 2004: 161) via the curatorially adapted collection he lives within. In *À rebours*' narrative, Huysmans depicts the character constructing a simulation of aesthetic time, complicating divisions of pastness by drawing memories into the present in an attempt to "subvert" or "annihilate" time (Donato, 2004: 3).<sup>311</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> Des Esseintes' way of turning himself into a literary character (Ziegler, 2004: 149).

<sup>308</sup> This is true for Baudelaire with his drugs, in the *Paradis Artificiels*, and Benjamin with his books; for both are "great stoppers of clocks" (Wilson, 2016: 167).

<sup>309</sup> Like the liturgical calendar which Huysmans will come to see as sublimating regulated time (Donato, 2004: 2).

<sup>310</sup> As described by Calinescu, (1977: 41) and adapted by Donato (2004: 3). The former of these bifurcations is the emergence of new Capitalist modes of measured and marketable time, allied to changing production industries and technological progress. The latter represents the simulacrum sought by Des Esseintes and the archetypal collector, defined by its rejection of bourgeois time in favour of an individual *durée* which is imaginative and creative.

<sup>311</sup> Perhaps an extension of the adaptation of 'Anywhere Out of the World.' Indeed, Mickel, who traces the influence of this poem on the novel, sees Des Esseintes' life at Lourps as Aestheticist, a retreat within reality

The escape into aesthetic time is the core motivation of the Decadent project of Des Esseintes, the adaptation of Nature, the curation and ornamentation of its decayed fragments, where each part “opens up infinite perspectives to the imagination of the initiate” (Huysmans, 1956: 80). Nature is intoxicated by artifice, whether of the senses (synaesthesia) or art (correspondences), for both metaphors and hashish for Baudelaire induce *les transpositions d'idées* (Leakey, 1969: 207; Hayter, 1968: 152). At Fontenay, memory and imagination create a text for Des Esseintes to live in, where the “artless production” of time as “nature’s way of measuring eternity” (Mickel, 1987: 158) seems to have been transcended by the timeless world of subjective creativity, of artifice, like Baudelaire’s 1857 ‘Rêve Parisien’ (1987).<sup>312</sup>

Through the asymptotic authorial interpretation, it is also possible to see Huysmans experimenting with retreat into Decadent aesthetics through the conduit of his character. In a slight shift from Ziegler’s version, Huysmans’ characters might be argued to be potential versions of himself, avatars exploring ways of transcending bourgeois time, where the individual is a *biblot* under an ordering which is mechanistic and not of their own design. Des Esseintes shows the flight into aesthetic time through the layerings of adaptation and curation in the allegorisation of Huysmans’ novel by his own commitment to the Decadent work. Time, embedded in *fin de siècle* Nature, is what is being authorially controlled through the curatorial adaptation of the external world in Des Esseintes’ narrative.

In the authored order of the collection, time becomes nonlinear. The repetitions of habit and ritual, the oscillations between memory and present experience, and the dialogic networks of intertextuality, all serve to emphasise for the knowing reader that Nature has been adapted; fragmented, curated, and ornamented out of the present. Similarly, in the sacred offices that Huysmans will turn to obsessively later in life, time also becomes nonlinear

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which fails, leading to the sanctuary apart from the world at Fontenay. Here he erodes his own temporal consciousness through artistic dreams and controlled memories, where imagination holds sway (1987: 158).

<sup>312</sup> Des Esseintes voices the aim when he describes “the unsatisfied longing for an ideal, the craving to escape from the horrible realities of life, to cross the frontiers of thought, to grope after a certainty, albeit without finding one, in the misty upper regions of art!” (Huysmans, 1956: 101).

(Donato, 2004: 104), in a sublimated circularity. In the monastic schedule, the repetitions become transcendent when accompanied by Christian belief, for sacred time “can be homologised to eternity” (Eliade, 1959: 70), a representation of the heavenly macrocosm in an earthly microcosm, and a mysticism of time that breaks the bourgeois. Huysmans will later achieve this through faith, accompanied by his character Durtal as avatar experiment. However, in *À rebours*, faith is yet to be attained, and the experiment deals with only an aestheticised and profane ritual, constituted by a curated adaptation, a collection which stimulates aesthetic time. This temporarily represses bourgeois temporality through methods of Decadent artifice which create the illusion of atemporality through techniques of adaptation and curation and their ability to negotiate between extremes of temporality.<sup>313</sup>

Aesthetic time as the Decadent aim which, for Huysmans, presages the immersion in Catholicism’s sacred time, can be further examined in terms of motivations and the asymptote through some of Des Esseintes’ key repressions. Whilst the curator is one collector (of the aesthetic/profane), the curate is another (of the faithful/sacred), and Des Esseintes might be seen to unite both the older ideas of the curate as carer for a parish of souls, and the more contemporary usage of the curator as more of “an artist-at-large, representing the world through the widest variety of media, locations and intentions” (Chaplin & Stara, 2010: 1): a collector of fragments which adapt a fragmentary collection representing the world.

It is in the ritual worship of art and artifice in Des Esseintes’ house, highlighted and supported by the curation of fragmentary Catholic elements, that the character may ‘care’ for the souls of his fellow Decadents. He releases them from the clutches of those such as Nisard, setting them alongside each other in a context where they might be worshipped and find similar company in aesthetic afterlife, that “intellectual fellowship” that he prizes above any real contact, for it delivers him from “the prison of his century” which social contact only

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<sup>313</sup> Hutcheon quotes Kubler: the “antipodes of the human experience of time are exact repetition, which is onerous, and unfettered variation, which is chaotic” (1962: 63), in order to suggest that the combination of these extremes in adaptation may be its appeal (2006: 173).



affirms (Huysmans, 1956: 166). Des Esseintes tends to the souls/works of Decadent writers, as curate and through curatorship; an adaptation of a collection to a museological collection-text. In the diegesis, objectified works signify a community of revenants-on-demand for Des Esseintes, whilst for the novel, allusions create the Decadent republic of letters.<sup>314</sup>

The curate and the curator as a single adapter creating the Decadent retreat evokes one of the frequent inversions effected by Des Esseintes; the Catholic text or object made profane through a new setting. Des Esseintes frequently delights in desacralising the ecclesiastical through an atheistic aestheticising, and it is a de-/re-contextualising through modes of micro-adaptation and curation that effects this.<sup>315</sup> The Catholic tensions present in the fragments that frequently draw the sacred and profane into conflict become symptoms for the dormant Catholicism which waits for its tertiary stage in the character; they signify its latency.<sup>316</sup> The curations and micro-adaptations of the Catholic are not only a kind of playing<sup>317</sup> based on the emptying out of metaphysical meaning, but a channelling of repressed faith. Des Esseintes considers whether he has committed sacrilege “in possessing articles which had once been solemnly consecrated,”<sup>318</sup> vacillating between “delight in these sacrilegious acts” and reassuring himself “that he did not put them to any depraved uses” (Huysmans, 1956: 77).

In Des Esseintes’ memories of religious childhood, his wondering as to “whether the seed which had fallen on apparently barren ground was not showing signs of germinating”

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<sup>314</sup> Potolsky’s phrase (2013), whilst Hillis-Miller also notes that allusions “perform a work of community-building” (2005: 146).

<sup>315</sup> As in his Trappist’s cell (Huysmans, 1956: 62), which conveys the “illusion” (1956: 63) of monkish austerity. Or in the “dreaming” brought by considering “the hypocrisy resulting from the extraordinary discrepancy between container and contents” in the Benedictine (Huysmans, 1956: 153).

<sup>316</sup> Indeed, Huysmans’ own comments in the preface, written twenty years after the novel, have been described in terms of a pre-Freudian psychoanalytic conception of the unconscious as the site of a developing conversion in the author too (Hanson, 1994: 108).

<sup>317</sup> Play being a route to profanation (Agamben, 2007: 75), whether of Capitalism or Catholicism.

<sup>318</sup> Such as the “ancient font that he used as a wash-basin” (Huysmans, 1956: 104).

(Huysmans, 1956: 72), and his despairing prayer at the end for the Lord to “take pity on the Christian who doubts” (1956: 204),<sup>319</sup> we might see a return of the curated/adapted. Des Esseintes has adapted the texts of Catholicism (a heterocosm including memories) to a collection text which forms a layer in the retreat, where as a mosaic adaptation its fragments are micro-adaptations of memories, texts, and objects to new versions and contexts as a collection spread across the museum. The character says that “I’ve had this leaven inside me, ready to ferment; the taste I’ve always had for religious objects may be proof of this” (Huysmans, 1956: 73). An obsession that has resided, for Des Esseintes, in a kind of attempted self-exorcism through adaptation, breaks out of these structures to reassert the past and adapt the adapter again. The parts of Catholicism rebel,<sup>320</sup> taking on more potency for being juxtaposed with the profane, and the curator falls prey to his curations, moving back in etymological time to become the curate of the aesthetics of the dying church by rekindling faith, rather than remaining its atheistic adapter who echoes its sacral time in his aesthetic version.

Similarly, the repression of mass (and Naturalist) collecting culture in favour of an adaptation of its tenets into *À rebours*’ atemporal curatorship might also be seen to be allegorised in the religious objects and their recontextualisations. In Des Esseintes’ world, the consumer culture of collecting, of *bibelots* and bourgeois time, is a deeper, unconscious version of the seemingly unconscious (though fairly obviously stated) battle with faith. In considering Huysmans’ relationship to *fin de siècle* collecting culture and Naturalism as a present materialism, the resurfacing present of modern consumer culture and bourgeois time for Huysmans is allegorised in the conversion trajectory lived by Des Esseintes in *À rebours*.

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<sup>319</sup> As well as - of course - Huysmans’ subsequent conversion.

<sup>320</sup> Recalling Bourget. The ‘Prologue’ embeds Catholicism, like nature, in Des Esseintes childhood, with connections to parental neglect. He begins his “apprenticeship” in theology in the family library at Lourps, which was left by “his great-great-uncle Dom Prosper, a former Prior” (Huysmans, 1956: 6). This evokes trauma, Naturalist heredity in terms of religion, and the activation of this ancestry through the critical reception of autodidactic reading.

As with the sacred and its pre-aestheticised metaphysical repletion, so with the materialistic: objects and texts contain the ghosts of their original selves prior to micro-adaptation and curation. There is a parallel pre-aestheticised consumerism in the profane half of the dialectic, which has been repressed in the adaptation to the museum of Fontenay, where *bibelots* and accumulation are sublimated and bring an aesthetic transcendence for the subject. In their tensions, these too threaten to return as a temporal present of bourgeois materialism, another categorically repressed dimension of past experience for character and author. Just as the sacred returns at the end of the novel, so does the present, with its modern consumerist associations - for Des Esseintes must return to Paris.

Huysmans' use of religious objects in the house built for Des Esseintes may in fact have been parodying (consciously or not) the decontextualisations effected by *bibelot* culture on the sacred;<sup>321</sup> where *fin de siècle* domestic interiors "that in previous times were reserved for intimacy with God were increasingly secularised as locales for self-reflection, leading to an excess of inner life" (Curtis, 2008: 40). Communion turns inwards in these new spaces, as through the evacuation of traditional symbolic content in both literal religious artefacts and artworks 'sacred' to Aestheticism, everything becomes a synecdoche for the curating self.

Des Esseintes is then the arch consumer, the Decadent curator who believes he has transcended the bourgeois culture of collecting but is actually participating in it. His creation of the retreat reveals his embeddedness in the bourgeois time of modernity: in its preparation, "purchases of all sorts still kept him perambulating the streets and ransacking the shops from one end of Paris to the other (Huysmans, 1956: 11). His final cry conflates these two strains which serve as allegories for each other, from either side of the sacred/profane dialectic of curations. With the return of the sacred comes a parallel return of the profane, revealing the truth of the collection. Des Esseintes is revealed as a parody of the secular collectors, his curations a mere veil for bourgeois materialism, and his illusions are

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<sup>321</sup> Described by Benjamin (2008: 12), and more recently by Brennan (2010: 24).

shattered. He must retreat from the temple-museum where he is curate and curator of his aesthetic religion, and instead become re-immersed in the faith and the society of his past, re-emerging from its repressive adaptation and curation in fragments to become present.

*À rebours* depicts the experiment with aesthetic time by Huysmans.<sup>322</sup> As found in this, his most Decadent novel, the artifice of the simulation is reliant on techniques of curation, such as fragmentary intertextuality which ornaments the more extended adaptations, or collection in objects within the real or fictional home. For the character, these create a personal and subjective<sup>323</sup> present of aestheticised time, where the temporal borders are made porous through memory and dreams stimulated by the *tremplin* objects and texts of past works and a present defined by habit and ritual. This is seen in the use of *tremplin* fragments in the curatorial adaptations: Des Esseintes desires works that will “shake up his nervous system” and then “transport” him away from “modern times and modern society” (Huysmans, 1956: 50). Des Esseintes relies on his curation, his collections of fragments, to deliver him from Nature via its adaptation, but the museum cannot be inhabited forever. At the heart of these tensions is a subject threatened by the reality that they inhabit, returning to those ideas of Huysmans re-appropriating cultures of collection to find an aestheticised place within consumerism; aesthetic temporality within the bourgeois.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Part of a central current of obsession with time and its representations in nineteenth-century art and science (Doane, 2002), Crary suggesting that these latter two are not discrete domains (1990: 76).

<sup>323</sup> For a collection is a discourse addressed to oneself (Baudrillard, 1994: 113).

<sup>324</sup> Huysmans’ despise for the bourgeoisie can be glimpsed in the hothouse chapter of *À rebours*, where Des Esseintes pities “the lower class flowers, wilting in the slums under the foul breath of sewers and sinks,” and admires the “rare and aristocratic plants from distant lands,” but loathes “those that go with the cream-and-gold drawing rooms in new houses” (Huysmans, 1956: 83).

## Aura

In considering the significance within *À rebours* of the way that ‘texts’ of Nature or its representations are micro-adapted to objecthood, and curated as a museological architext of aesthetic time, the concept of aura is relevant.<sup>325</sup> The *biblot* culture had accelerated as a direct result of the possibilities of mechanical reproduction, and Huysmans’ attitude towards the bourgeois collectors was one of disdain based on a natural affinity for aura.<sup>326</sup>

Technological mimesis and adaptation are both modes of afterlife and return, hauntings which “resurrect” the past (Emery & Morowitz, 2004: 293), having a radical ability to undermine auratic art.<sup>327</sup> Benjamin sees Baudelaire’s work as challenging auratic art (2006: 22) through its modernity, shattering aura’s illusions of distance through techniques of shock and fragmentation that mirror the technological Capitalist city. In terms of narrative and intention, Huysmans’ *À rebours*, despite being bound to the work of Baudelaire, seemingly does not mirror this effect, but runs counter to it. It depicts a flight from modernity into aura, with the latter made dogmatic, an aesthetic faith of ritual and desirably unstable distances in time and space.

A version of reproducibility is made auratic within the world of Des Esseintes, as the process of objectification, of condensing texts down into synecdochical fragments,<sup>328</sup> obsesses over authenticity and display in a heightening of aura which is further emphasised in

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<sup>325</sup> Benjamin’s revised conceptions of aura in ‘Some Motifs on Baudelaire’ focus on a decline in aura in a more ambiguous sense, and the implications of this, whereas *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility* takes up a perspective which celebrates the potential of mechanical reproducibility to challenge the hegemonies of classical art (2008: 8). This position will certainly become relevant to an examination of adaptation’s place in these debates, but it is one far from Huysmans’ attitude, as seen in his relationship to Zola’s *bibelots*.

<sup>326</sup> Similar to Benjamin’s discussions of the decline as a loss in ‘The Storyteller’ (1968).

<sup>327</sup> Corrigan highlighting the fact that in Benjamin’s view of film’s radical ability to undermine auratic art, it is the “remakings, transformations, and adaptations” that are key (Corrigan, 2007: 41).

<sup>328</sup> Including *Salome*, where the painting is critically framed in order to assert the parallel in terms of intentionality and make the painting a synecdoche, where “the painter seemed to have wished to assert his intention of remaining outside the bounds of time” (Huysmans, 1956: 53).

ritualised reception. Aura is harnessed as a producer of aesthetic time, knitted together by curation as an effect of adaptation as a whole: textual reception in aesthetic time, where objects are *tremplins*<sup>329</sup> launching the subject beyond the material world into the distances of reverie and memory: “seeing through [objects] into their distant past” (Benjamin, 1968: 61).<sup>330</sup> They allow Des Esseintes to “intoxicate” himself “with the magical charms of style” which opens up those “infinite perspectives to the imagination of the initiate” (Huysmans, 1956: 80). Paintings such as those of Odilon Redon “evoked in Des Esseintes’ mind recollections of typhoid fever,” a reception producing internal spatiotemporal distance which is itself intertextual and transmedial, being “the same sort of malaise he experienced when he looked at certain rather similar *Proverbs* by Goya, or read some of Edgar Allan Poe’s stories, whose terrifying or hallucinating effects Odilon Redon seemed to have transposed into a different art” (Huysmans, 1956: 60).

An auratic reception producing subjective distances, sacralised by the Decadent, recalls Benjamin’s assertion that Aestheticism was a theology of art which emerged as a reaction to the crisis of reproductions brought about by the advent of photography (2008: 11). Aesthetic time and auratic time might indeed be a conflation; the auratic object is the route to aesthetic time, which is itself an engagement with the distance of aura. Des Esseintes is obsessed with this condition, manufacturing auratic experience in a denial of modernity, inducing distance in the flight to imagined versions of past ages and a lineage of Decadence. The text of the museum-house as an adaptive simulation becomes a machine producing a space of ritualised distances which repress bourgeois time and Nature in favour of aesthetic suspension in the reception process which is aura.

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<sup>329</sup> Huysmans actually describes these in the novel, where in discussing Dutch paintings, Des Esseintes says that “they had in fact served as a spring-board from which he had soared into a dream world of false trails and impossible ambitions” (Huysmans, 1956: 127).

<sup>330</sup> In criticising the materialism of Naturalism, Huysmans notes their failure to grasp the idea that “art only becomes interesting when the senses cease to help us” (cited in Baldick, 1955: 205), when they become merely conduits to more exalted spheres (a classically mystical approach).

Huysmans, however, does not have the luxury of constructing such a retreat, only adapting one through *ekphrasis*. The accession of reproductions and their impact on the personal museums of the collectors of the *fin de siècle* was predictably “bemoaned” by Huysmans (Emery and Morowitz, 2004: 300) whose “complaint against ‘fakes’ was a thinly disguised polemic against the mass production of once ‘authentic’ objects.” Aura for Huysmans had to become something more akin to a compromise with modernity, and a mode had to be sought that would hold the auratic within changing textualities and objecthood, as well as a definition of its role with regards to new modes of collection, adaptation, and technological reproduction.

Just as collection without agency<sup>331</sup> - or fidelity remediation - results in an empty text, aura disintegrates for Benjamin in poor photographic practice, where recording is the only motive (1968: 224). In a reclamation rather than a rejection, Baudelaire preferred the copy to the original.<sup>332</sup> The engagement with aura in *À rebours* is one which also seeks a reworking of fragmentation and mimesis, finding ways to generate aura within the changing aesthetic dynamics of personal museums, objecthood, and textualities in the *fin de siècle*. Aura represents perpetuity through art, remaining after the death of the individual artist, as a relic of creative life. The auratic view of art is a hagiographical framework for authorship and a sacralisation of aesthetics, and its resurrection of the past is central to Des Esseintes’ “crowning illusion” (1956: 166); that he would have been more at home in another historical period.

This is an illusion which the character manufactures through the stimulation of imagination by *tremplin* intertexts, where through immersive reception “he bursts out of the prison of his century and roams about at liberty in another period” (Huysmans, 1956: 166).

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<sup>331</sup> Agency as critical creativity with regards to analogies and juxtapositions, or authorial intention.

<sup>332</sup> Grotta argues that the poet developed a sophisticated understanding of photography’s *dispositive* in its authored ability to fragment reality, recontextualise the detail, and rupture the fidelity goals of realism (Grotta, 2015: 47-54 & 70-71). This is present in his work in the recurrence of the window motif, echoing the arcades of Benjamin, and being another appropriation of Capitalist aesthetics.

“Under the influence of the Gustave Moreau pictures hanging on the walls,” a “whole series of plastic impressions” take over Des Esseintes’ thoughts, a springing from the object to a reverie of spatiotemporal distance, an auratic reception.<sup>333</sup>

Aura is the thread that leads back into the past. Hence the house and novel as a museum, the space that “animates objects as the sources of knowledge, and simultaneously as aesthetic, auratic things” (Henning, 2006: 18). This also underpins the obsession with the authenticity of materials: of significant editions of books, of blessed paper, where the palimpsestuous pleasure of the spectator derives from the authenticity of sacred/profane form/content dissonances. Aura is the soul of the museum, and Des Esseintes worships aura ensconced in the corporeality of aesthetics as a substitute for the eternity communicated by sacred ritual. The view that mechanical reproduction destroys aura<sup>334</sup> is therefore one likely to resonate with Des Esseintes as avatar for Huysmans.<sup>335</sup> This perspective would suggest that faux-Medieval *bibelots* are empty vessels, for these do not have the auratic soul needed for a sacralised aesthetics, for an immersive aesthetic time; they signify only the present of meaningless eternal returns.<sup>336</sup> However many of Des Esseintes’ objects can be thought of as

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<sup>333</sup> This auratic reception from fragmentary *tremplins* has its own intertextual ancestor acknowledged in the text: “Just as De Quincey, after a dose of opium, had only to hear the words ‘Consul Romanus’ to conjure up whole pages of Livy, to see the consuls coming forward in solemn procession or witness the Roman legions moving off in pompous array, so Des Esseintes would be left gasping with amazement as some theological expression evoked visions of surging multitudes and episcopal figures silhouetted against the fiery windows of their basilicas. Apparitions like these kept him entranced, hurrying in imagination from age to age, and coming down at last to the religious ceremonies of modern times, to the accompaniment of endless waves of music, mournful and tender” (Huysmans, 1956: 77).

<sup>334</sup> Benjamin’s perspective in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (2008), published in 1936.

<sup>335</sup> Whose relationship to the *bibelot* shows his affinity for aura and a belief coinciding with Benjamin’s first work on aura.

<sup>336</sup> The perspectives on time here require some qualifying, in that both mechanical reproduction and aesthetic or sacred time both incorporate a repetition divorced from conventional structures of individual entropy. However, there is a difference in the way that under Benjamin’s 1936 reflections, the object loses its aura with each repetition, therefore losing its meaning in repetitions of form. This is contrasted with the repetitions of aesthetic/sacred time, reached through aura, where the subject finds a version of infinite repetition which does not degenerate meaning as it progresses, but remains fixed through belief (even under mystical aesthetics – explored in the next section). As this section argues, adaptation may present a way to negotiate between these perspectives. The difference between these temporalities, and the ideas of repetition, embodiment, and entropy, are all explored in depth in Chapter Six.



reproductions to some degree; however, it is perhaps in the alterations of creative authorship that makes them micro-adaptations rather than copies (e.g. authored objectification and curation) where we see a reclamation of aura within modernity.

The nineteenth century was a time when “the household gods [were] historicism and conservation” (Maleuvre, 1999: 115), where history “means imitation, not creation” (1999: 117), where style is debased to pastiche, and the *biblot* reigns supreme as a symbol of “an age besotted with historical mimeticism” (1999: 119). The philosophies of pastness based on mimesis might have birthed mechanical reproduction as much as the technologies did. In a time where most interiors manifest an inability to deal with the past that is not reproduction, the adaptations and curations of *À rebours* suggest ways to reconstitute a version of aura based on a chronotope that defies the fidelity of mimesis through the authorship of artifice.

Museums change, and mechanically reproduced objects will come to gain their own aura, for such a thing is conferred by acknowledged context and reception, not by method of production. Aura seems to invoke Adaptation Studies’ most tireless revenant: fidelity, as the privileging of ‘originals’ in discussions of proximity is an aura-fixation. However, post-structuralism, postmodernism,<sup>337</sup> and Adaptation Studies have all shown the fallacy of the Romantic model of originals.<sup>338</sup> Aura is not destroyed in adaptation – if anything, the source is enhanced by its adaptation. However, in order for an adaptation to hold its own aura it must embrace the change required by the term, and not aim for fidelity/mimesis. Curation and adaptation are creative reproductions because of differences and changes enacted by authorial agency: the artifices of intention.

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<sup>337</sup> Postmodernism has steeped itself in considerations of aura in a world of simulation and reproduction, troubling over the replacement of the ‘real’ by textualised replicas, picking up Benjamin’s thread. However, adaptation theorists such as Sanders and Hutcheon have noted the practice and its products’ potential for removing negative framings from the auratic consequences of reproduction, with Sanders commenting that the unavoidable loss of aura in modernity actually frees texts in their “afterlife” from the “stranglehold of the original” (2005: 148), an echoing of the post-structuralist levelling brought to texts by intertextuality’s networks.

<sup>338</sup> See Stam and Raengo (2004/2005) in particular for the application of intertextuality, which achieves this. See Jellenik (2017) and Elliott (2003) for the way this view has shaped adaptation discourse.

Fidelity destroys the potential for aura in the adaptation, which cannot have an individual identity, as it is so concerned with reflecting the source.<sup>339</sup> What is needed instead is refraction,<sup>340</sup> the distance in proximity evoked by adaptive change. Fidelity adaptation is mechanical reproduction, generating uncanniness in mimesis, a negative loss of aura; a doppelgänger. It fails to achieve both relevance for its own context - one route to aura - or aesthetic independence.

Aura may, however, be perpetuated by creative adaptation, but must acknowledge itself as such a text<sup>341</sup> and revel in its status by embracing change and artifice. Hutcheon says that it is precisely the independence of the adaptation which affirms its aura, where “each layer of the palimpsest must make sense individually” in order to reject the status of copy (2006: 173). This is the memory and change of adaptation which refuses structures of fidelity in its creative process, with retains authorial artifice in a ritual of recognition (2006: 173).

This uses a sublimated version of reproduction achieved through the emphasis on decay (via change), yet a denial of “corporeal finitude” (Dalle Vacche, 2003: 8). Rather than the uncanny perpetuations of mechanical reproductions as imitable bodies without souls, adaptation evokes a cyclical regenerative principle embracing artistic agency. This manages to signify a version of atemporality in aesthetics that carries the hope and ritual of sacred art into the commodity world of modernity. It integrates, rather than represses the copy, in the

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<sup>339</sup> It is important to note here that this thesis does not claim any originality in denigrating fidelity adaptation, neither does it claim that scholars of adaptation believe fidelity to be possible in any absolute sense (unless the adaptation is a perfect copy in the same medium, like Menard's *Quixote* in the Borges story). However, as a principle it remains in the terminology of artistic goals in some adaptations. It is important in the context of Huysmans, Decadence, and the *fin de siècle* because Decadent artifice and adaptation need to be defined against mimesis, as the differences are often small, and because the *biblot* culture of technological reproducibility is an important context for the curatorial adaptations in *À rebours*. Similarly, Decadence exists centrally in the period of Romantic original-worship noted by Jellenik (2017), but also in terms of practice comes at a time when (as a proto-postmodern era) imitation is rife and originals seem rare, with a lack of a distinctive style frequently bemoaned (see previous page).

<sup>340</sup> A term also utilised by Geraghty (2008).

<sup>341</sup> The reflexivity identified by Geraghty (2008) and Hutcheon (2006), among others.

manner suggested as necessary for Modernism by Krauss (1981), where reproducibility allows for play.<sup>342</sup>

The curatorial method within the adaptations suggested for *À rebours*, which is formed of fragments of micro-adaptation adapted as one source to a mosaic-text, has been shown to frequently micro-adapt intertexts to objects within the diegesis. Des Esseintes, with his authentic one-of-a-kind bindings, adapts already auratic content to forms which enhance and extend it into other media. Their curatorial display in the museum of Fontenay-aux-Roses fetishises their aura, and as guide for the reading experience of this text in the novel, this character's scholarly notes detail provenance and authenticity.

The prevalence of adaptations in *À rebours* make it unlikely that Huysmans sees all adaptive formulations as textual versions of mechanical reproduction. Instead, something inherent to the shift to the novel's textuality, or perhaps the knowledge of process means that adaptations and other forms of intertextuality can stay separate from the copies engendered by the new industrial influences in the world of objects. The fragmentariness of curatorial adaptation, where intertexts exist as notional visual representations encapsulated in critical *ekphrasis*, makes mimesis or technological reproduction impossible in *À rebours*, encouraging reflexivity in the reader by demanding associative reception.

Benjamin, when writing on Baudelaire, describes the experience of modernity as a fragmented one, where the subject is prey to a constant series of shocks (2006: 202), and where aura disintegrates amongst proliferating simulacra. *Fin de siècle* society was experiencing this shift, and aesthetes and Decadents were particularly sensitive to the perceived emptiness of the consumer culture when compared to the quasi-religious fulfilment of auratic aesthetics. Whilst the majority of the novel depicts a flight from these new cultural conditions, the very fact of being in opposition to them works to encode the repressions in

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<sup>342</sup> Ivory says that both Decadence and Modernism invoke the past to point out the inability of contemporary literary norms (such as realism) "to capture the complexities and confusions of modern subjectivity" (2016; 107).

other ways.<sup>343</sup> In trying to write away the *fin de siècle*, *À rebours* manages only to write of it, as suggested by the allegorical relationships of the sacred/profane regarding objecthood. It could indeed be seen that the curatorial style of adaptations in the novel - particularly in relation to the source text of *Nature* - is a representation of the fragmenting of experience.

Benjamin also stated that the fragmentary shock experiences of modernity were addressed by the evolution of mass media (2006: 175), which provide an equivalent in the aesthetic, technical sphere, a reporting of spectacle in chunks of time-bound information. These media versions of the modern experience can be seen as a “mastery of trauma through repetition” (Henning, 2006: 107), a Freudian projection of the experience of modernity into forms which both reflect it and assuage, momentarily, the anxieties it produces.<sup>344</sup> Benjamin sees intoxication and distraction as the temporary salves of modernity, and so *fin de siècle* media, such as film, begin to take on these forms (Benjamin, 2008: 25). In modernity, the balm and the irritant are almost indistinguishable. In this way, Decadent novelists of the *fin de siècle*, such as Huysmans, addressed the new modern experience in ways that go beyond mere contextual representation: they channelled the tensions of new subjective experiences in the same manner as Baudelaire.<sup>345</sup> Huysmans could not help but be influenced by “contemporary mass media culture” (Sitzia, 2015: 67).<sup>346</sup>

Not only in its Decadent forms, but more generally, adaptation might be seen to be one of the ways in which media forms have come to embody the fragmentations and repetitions of modernity, working alongside the chopped-up montage of film. In this sense, *À rebours'* Decadent aesthetics of adaptation were both symptomatic of these shifts, and perspicacious, for they activated the potential of adaptation to take on these symbolic burdens, to become an

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<sup>343</sup> “Deeper historical realities” become “registered as unconscious traumas” (Meek, 2011: 78).

<sup>344</sup> Murray has discussed the way that the experience of the artificial, constructed spaces of the modern city in the *fin de siècle* led Decadent writers to reflect this in the acknowledged artifices of their style (2016).

<sup>345</sup> Recalling Adorno's ideas regarding the need for art to appropriate Capitalist structures, but to hold them at a critical distance in a reflecting negation (1997: 30-31).

<sup>346</sup> As in the interiors of *À rebours*, which Bertrand has shown to be very much of their time (1996: 116-118).

active dimension of texts rather than merely a function of textual interrelation. Huysmans valorises aura in the novel's subject matter, but on a formal level, fragmentary adaptive montage creates distantiation. In this sense, it is seemingly a backward-looking mourning of aura via *Des Esseintes*, but actually is truly a Baudelairean adaptation in its stylistic representation of Benjaminian modernity. Whether inadvertent or not, Decadent adaptation as found in *À rebours* shows one interpretation of how adaptation came to function in the twentieth century. It suggests that adaptation as a component of modern creativity is in a direct relationship to the experiential and ontological conditions of modernity, and that its emergence as a widespread cultural cross-media force is not an arbitrary evolution, but one directly bound to how media aesthetics engage with modernity.

Since film brought adaptation to the fore, it has been proliferating within the cultural sphere, all the way up to the twenty-first century, where so much is adapted, sampled, collaged. Adaptation is both fragmented and fragmentary, and a process of repetitions across media, constituting a kind of ur-linearity, a hidden coherence for the attentive audience. It provides shocks of recognition, it depicts and caters to distraction in its constant looking away from the work at hand to past and future works, in its inherent transgressions of formal and textual boundaries, and in its cross-referencing and multimediality. It encourages reflexivity, revealing the consumer world of transferable, available texts, of the mechanisms of production. It intoxicates previous subject matter into a reverie of itself, and it induces intoxication in the bombardment of its self- and extra-referentiality.

Adaptation is characterised by intoxication and distraction, by repetition which both perpetuates the traumatic experience of modernity and defers and tries to master it. The adaptation might perhaps be seen as one of the representative aspects of the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, participating in and representing the culture of post-auratic repetitions. In its adaptations, *À rebours* holds a mirror up to the *fin de siècle* experience of the modern.

A novel such as *À rebours* depicts an attempt to deal with the new age of consumption and reproduction by trying to reconcile the elements of exhibition and artifice with the auratic principle and its links to aesthetic time. These ideas seem to prefigure the modern cycles of adaptation that have reincorporated distance and the auratic principles of ritual into the age of ephemeral reproduction (digital). It is the mobilising aspect of adaptation that has made it such a ubiquitous function of modern textualities. Mirroring the increased mobility of the populace and of objects in consumerist paradigms, which perpetrate the “wrenching of things from their familiar contexts” (Benjamin, 2006: 148), adaptations bring a freedom of movement to texts.

This is an important process for modern media, which are “characterised by their ability to detach objects, scenes and people, from their fixed place in time and space, and to allow them - or their forensic traces - to circulate as multiples and reproductions” (Henning, 2006: 71). It is adaptation as process that allows this. Where museums display the auratic object, adaptations signify the auratic object by presenting a version of it, acknowledging their own status as objects produced self-reflexively under the conditions of modernity, and showing that the aura of artworks is not actually predicated on authenticity. Instead, in modernity, there are no originals,<sup>347</sup> but there are chains or networks of adaptation, and this knowledge constitutes a modulated version of aura, reformulating auratic loss. As Bazin saw for photography, the reproduction becomes the original in an artistic process of Modernism,<sup>348</sup> analogous to adaptation. As even Des Esseintes notes in his explanations for his ecclesiastical tendencies, the church has, like a museum or a reliquary, preserved “even in shoddy modern reproductions” the traditional forms which retain their aura through this echo, not through the materials: grace remains “even in aluminium” (Huysmans, 1956: 73-4). The museum aesthetic makes it possible for reproductions to retain aura. The mobility of

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<sup>347</sup> As in Levi-Strauss on myth (1955).

<sup>348</sup> Explored in *The Ontology of the Photographic Image* (1960). Luckhurst and Ledger actually see Naturalism as mirroring photography’s ability to capture the entirety of a scene (2000: xvi).

things accelerated by the changing museum aesthetics that influence personal collecting map onto textualities, and adaptations become auratic forms in Decadence thanks to its seizing of the museological form, undermining the mythology of originality from Romanticism.

Adaptations “carry” aura with them (Hutcheon, 2006: 4), meaning that it is the link that becomes important, for the singular instantiated object cannot be trusted in a world of simulacra - it is more important to acknowledge the artifice and celebrate the interpretations of curation, than to debate fidelity. Thus mechanical reproduction is turned from a threat to a counterpoint, shoring up the fragments of aura by its very existence as exemplifying a lack of aura. The location of aura within process allows the auratic engagement with art to exist in all media forms, refusing the “bad infinity” (Benjamin, 2006: 202) of uncanny repetitions.

Textual recyclability challenges the consumerist ideal of the disposable reproduction and its binary opposite, the priceless original, where instead the boundaries of singular instantiated forms are made porous, allowing for the potential of multiplicities. In this formulation, Benjamin’s ‘authenticity value’ (2008: 11) is lost, but historicity is not. The latter actually expands with adaptation, forming a new aura of genealogy and connectivity. Through adaptation we retain historical aura without needing authenticity value. By 1900, Benjamin sees technological reproduction as having “even gained a place for itself among artistic modes of procedure” (2008: 5). This place could be construed as adaptation, the auratic mode of reproduction that reclaims the process from the simulacral artifice of the technological, returning it to the mediated artifice of the creative. With their collections of reproduced, yet adapted and curated objects, works like *À rebours* can be seen as a representation of this reclamation.

The recent work by Dicecco is important to end on here, as this presents a creative reimagining of the role of aura in relation to adaptations, and is one which is similar to the way that aura has been discussed through this sub-section. Dicecco relocates adaptation in reception, not only in activation but as a creative act. Rather than a focus on product, this

takes up reception as adaptation through the concept of aura, connecting the idea of Hutcheon's 'oscillation' with Benjamin's 'noetic return' in memory evoked by mechanical reproduction. The unique existence of aura therefore pertains to the audience and not the object, a spatiotemporally unique oscillation. Here, auratic generation is a performative act, a temporal encounter with againness, the non-mimetic recurrence of experiencing adaptation. Here, the source and the adaptation are not simultaneously engaged with, neither are they fixed works, but archival objects and embodied memories (2017: 609-620).

Dicecco disagrees with Hutcheon in terms of adaptations carrying aura with them, as their aura of againness can only be present when an audience is materially engaged with them (2017: 620). Whilst (*pace* Dicecco) I contend that adaptations carry aura with them, the idea of auratic reception is a useful one here for considering the engagement with the fragmentary adaptation with its multiple *tremplins* dramatized in the narrative of Des Esseintes. The character experiences the aura of adaptive reception, of temporal oscillation, whenever he is launched into reverie or memory by a piece of his mosaic-adaptation. It is the connection between the work which is a part of the larger adaptation, the sensory engagement which is its embodied reception, and the disembodiment of spatiotemporal oscillation, which are the way in which Des Esseintes' reception of his adaptive text employs auratic reception as a route to aesthetic time. The aura of againness in this text is that of the disappearance of either the past or the present in the oscillation between the two that comes through sensory reception. Aura for Des Esseintes is the experience of the intertexts, micro-adaptations, and collection-texts of his adaptation, and it delivers him to aesthetic time, utilising the body in order to leave it behind.



## Museums of Mysticism

The museum is the medium, the cultural form which, when remediated to the home or the novel, allows for the kind of adaptation of a textualised reality to an architextual representation incorporating a surface intertextual layer. Similarly, curation describes the process of adaptation that is the dominant mode for the creation of this. The two also suggest the link between these forms and ideas of temporality, as well as evoking *fin de siècle* material culture, and the mysticism taken up by Modernism – both being important to Decadence.

Aura, as a process of reception leading to aesthetic time, is recalled in museums being described as oneiric spaces of transformation, with the potential for “losing one’s self or imagining one’s self differently” (Henning, 2006: 99). This is certainly an important aspect of Des Esseintes’ architextual museum within the world of the novel’s narrative, for he is both curator and audience. The personal aspect of the creation and the reception for this character makes the space of his retreat even more dreamlike, for objects are curated to engender specific experiences tailored to a subjective past. He stages his museum for himself only, pursuing an escapist fantasy into aesthetic time via an auratic collection of micro-adaptations, which form an extended, stylising adaptation of Nature. Des Esseintes explains his “penchant for artificiality and love of eccentricity” as “the results of sophisticated studies, super-terrestrial subtleties, semi-theological speculations; fundamentally, they were ardent aspirations towards an ideal, towards an unknown universe, towards a distant beatitude, as utterly desirable as that promised by the Scriptures” (Huysmans, 1956: 75). This is the aesthetic time which suggests aesthetic mysticism.

The hints towards a secular transcendence through aesthetics and objecthood, as well as the transformative influences on the self found in spaces that stage the past in the present and disrupt boundaries, suggest some of the connections between Modernist museums and *À rebours*’ adaptive relationships. Both curatorship and adaptation as practices rely on an

intuitive ability to make connections between disparate temporalities and spaces.<sup>349</sup> There is potentially a mystical dimension to the creation and reception of adaptations and curations within a framework of sacralised aesthetics, both relying on the perception of “deeply interwoven relations” between “seemingly oppositional categories” such as presence and absence (Brennan, 2010: 3).<sup>350</sup> Adaptation requires the awareness of unconventional modes of creation, with its focus on how an absent text might be made spectrally present within a new version via the oscillation or doubleness of collage and palimpsestuous reading, which would come to define much of early twentieth century Modernist practice.<sup>351</sup>

The perception of interrelationships that underpins adaptation and curation in Decadent aesthetics can be traced through a synaesthetic, analogical shift in the mid-nineteenth century that saw the re-emergence of the *correspondences* via Wagner, Nietzsche, Baudelaire, and others. In fact, adaptation’s presence in *À rebours*, its forms and significance, might to some extent be a product of the resonances between aspects of adaptation and the *correspondences*. Baudelaire’s work, as an adapted heterocosm which includes ideas that guide and theorise the significance and function of adaptations in the novel, resurfaces here. Baudelaire’s 1857 poem ‘Correspondances’ popularised a version of Swedenborgian and Wagnerian doctrines (Walker, 2014: 175),<sup>352</sup> building on an “extensive philosophical background” (Hassan, 1954: 438). The poem might be seen to underpin adaptation in *À rebours*, especially in its significance for the adaptation of Nature. Indeed, Baldick says that the spirit of the *correspondences* “pervades” *À rebours* (1955: 124).

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<sup>349</sup> The kind of perception of deeper structures that recall the *correspondences* of Baudelaire, or the more Hermetic researches of earlier centuries (see van den Broek & Hanegraaff (1998)).

<sup>350</sup> Perhaps a broad initial distinction might be made between curation as revealing the relationships between things, and adaptation as creating interrelationships, though these are certainly not mutually exclusive.

<sup>351</sup> Perloff has explored the “oscillation and doubleness” of collage and the centrality of this form and its modes of reading to Modernist art (1998: 384).

<sup>352</sup> The *correspondences* as an aesthetic theory were transmitted to Baudelaire primarily through the work of Wagner, whose influence on the culture of the 1880s and 1890s is unquestionable (Murray and Hall, 2013: 9). It was also central to another influential figure of the nineteenth century, Swedenborg, whose mystical version complements Wagner’s more aesthetic conception.

In Baudelaire, the *correspondences* deal with a conceptualisation of poetic perception, where imagination perceives analogical links between disparate areas of reality, signifying a divine unity beneath the world's surface, creating a chain or network which signifies beyond the sum of its parts towards a real not fragmented by representations (Leahey, 1969: 181).<sup>353</sup> This clearly has its mystical dimension, and relates back to Hermetic doctrines of microcosm and macrocosm, recalling the rituals of aura. However, it also - through Baudelaire's influence - generates the popular *fin de siècle* conception of synaesthesia, the *correspondences* of the second part of the sonnet, between different sense modalities, where the first deals with the classical real/spiritual analogies of mysticism. Synaesthesia came to dominate *fin de siècle* works after *À rebours*, and a version of this in terms of media and texts might also be posited, where the *correspondences* create the *gesamtkunstwerk*, relying on analogues between art forms which suggest a potential applicability for adaptation, as they break down interart barriers (Kosinski, 1994: 151)<sup>354</sup> and mobilise texts, suggesting a connectivity and detachability.

The *correspondences* are a privileged concept in Baudelaire's work (Minahen, 1992), a doctrine of poetic metaphysics which Leahey argues is more of a literary theory than is often thought (1969: 139). In this version, the perception and use of analogies is closely linked to artistic practice, rather than more mystical perceptions, a theory of poetry related to interrelationships constituted of "purely terrestrial analogies" (Leahey, 1969: 176). In his 1859 article on Gautier, Baudelaire explicitly links universal analogies to literary analogies,

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<sup>353</sup> Grotta has suggested that Baudelaire also reconfigures time in his work through the juxtapositions of past and present in "dense constellations" of analogy (2015: 147), while space is similarly reconfigured through processes of decomposition and recomposition which have also been shown to underpin Decadent adaptation.

<sup>354</sup> Mallarmé's use of analogy is celebrated for this too, where, "sensitive to the remotest affinities, he would often use a term that by analogy suggested at once form, scent, colour, quality and brilliance." The poet is also lionised for his ability to get close to Des Esseintes' 'osmazome' artistic ideal in his "condensed style," and for sheltering within "lofty scorn" from the "raging folly all around him" in "a time of commercial greed" (Huysmans, 1956: 180-181).

grounding the metaphysics of mystical *correspondences* in the arts of metaphor.<sup>355</sup> This is again reliant on the subjectivity of the artist<sup>356</sup> who is able to glimpse the analogies hidden in nature, where the forest of symbols appears to the imagination, that queen of faculties (Baudelaire, 1992: 32) which defines interrelationships, providing intimations of the universal analogy (Milner, 1971: 30).

For Baudelaire, the analogies of the *correspondences* are buried within the texts of Nature, requiring the poetic individual whose imagination divines the ‘supernatural’ aspect of the natural, which is not something objective, but a combining of self and nature, a divining of subjective nature, which reveals its significance. The supernatural is “that aspect of Nature which reveals itself to the sensitive observer at certain uniquely privileged moments” (Leahey, 1969: 181). Here, the ability to transcend the natural aesthetically is revealed, which is the method for adapting the source, the raw material of nature, the ‘dictionary,’ into a work of art that combines the objective and subjective. This is the project of Des Esseintes in his museum of auratic, mystical aesthetics, where objects enter into a “network of *correspondences*” (Mitchievici, 2011: 14).

For Baudelaire, the imagination reveals analogies to the observer in supernatural moments,<sup>357</sup> analogies which are the basis for creative thinking, for metaphors which may be set down in a work. These may constitute a stylising adaptation of Nature, a version of the source reformulated by subjective creative criticality. Based in the temperament of the artist adapting nature’s dictionary, seeing the resonances between ‘words,’ there is the potential to “transform” the “bombardment of messages” in these heightened moments into “images of a

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<sup>355</sup> In the 1859 article on Gautier (1992).

<sup>356</sup> Connecting analogical reading to both artists and readers.

<sup>357</sup> Where things take on “a deepened and vibrant eloquence of their own” (Leahey, 1969: 205), as in hashish intoxication for Baudelaire. Des Esseintes has resorted to this in his past, but these “crude stimulants” had “brought on vomiting and violent nervous disorders,” so instead he asked his brain “alone and unaided, to carry him far away from everyday life into the land of dreams” (Huysmans, 1956: 158).

singular clarity, depth and vividness, drawn specifically, and often simultaneously, from the domains of colour, perfume, sound” (Leahey, 1969: 207).

Synaesthesia for Hassan is the most “obvious” implication of Baudelaire’s sonnet (1954: 439).<sup>358</sup> Synaesthesia levels barriers between the senses and reflects a totality, a “primitive wholeness” (Walker, 2014: 439), a total mystical reality (Wade, 1974: 377). Synaesthesia therefore becomes a way to express the perception of unity, communicable analogies which, through the mapping from one domain to another, speak of the glimpsed spaces in between, and of a hidden totality. Like Baudelaire’s comments on the experiences of opium and hashish<sup>359</sup> synaesthesia and intermediality get closest to conveying the profound unity glimpsed when the forest of symbols shimmers forth as aesthetic time. The *correspondences* are the system of aesthetic creativity that redeems the Natural within Baudelaire’s philosophy of poetic thought, sublimating it through perceptions which enact adaptations bringing the originality of artificiality, where temperament transmutes the base metals of Nature into the supernatural, where the objective and the subjective fuse via auratic analogy into a deeper truth.

The *correspondences* as an aesthetic doctrine can be read as a theory of resonance which disrupts boundaries and mobilises forms, hinting at a unity which encourages transfer via analogy. It sacralises analogy as an aesthetic principle,<sup>360</sup> collapsing the medium specificity of the previous century with a communicability which has clear relevance for the practice of adaptation.<sup>361</sup> Baudelaire did not purposefully take the next step in terms of theorising adaptation, even though transpositions “abound” in his poems.<sup>362</sup> However, it is a clear

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<sup>358</sup> A view taken up by the end of the century, where synaesthesia was being linked with spiritual insight (Walker, 2014: 177).

<sup>359</sup> An artificial inducing of the imaginative paradise of the supernatural.

<sup>360</sup> Analogy is Baudelaire’s ‘Muse’ (Calasso, 2012: 11), and is “fundamental to [Baudelaire’s] aesthetic, because it is fundamental to the operations of the mind, forming an integral part of its structure” (Hiddleston, 1994: 18).

<sup>361</sup> *Correspondences* refer to “productive” analogies (Sanders, 2005: 12).

<sup>362</sup> Particularly those on Delacroix (Hiddleston, 1994: 3).

consequence of centralising analogy and celebrating the *correspondences* as a “system of correlatives and equivalences” (Hassan, 1954: 444) that adaptations, particularly intermedial transpositions, will be more relevant to related aesthetic positions.

Gorceix says that “once nature is no more than a vast symbol, all exchanges and all transfers, all “*correspondences*” become possible” (1985: 91), evoking the adaptation of Nature, but also the clear link between anti-nature, an aesthetic theory of sacred analogy, and adaptations between media which seem to suggest an analogical network like the *gesamtkunstwerk*. Huysmans requires the *correspondences* for the intermedial intertextuality and adaptations of works into the novel; for the *ekphrases*, the musical descriptions, and the representation of his character’s *gesamtkunstwerk*.<sup>363</sup> The *correspondences* also represent a similar aesthetic mysticism to the auratic, a revelation of othered perception inhering within the prosaic, and a way that aesthetic interrelationships might convey these ideas. The Baudelairean intertext is acknowledged in a similar manner to the chimney Trinity of poems which evoked the pursuit of atemporality; through a synecdochical self-contained intertextual citation denoting extended adaptation, in the form of the mouth organ. Here, the founding principle of the ‘music’ is the interart analogy, and Brunel shows that the main principles of the creation of symphonies from the machine are similar to Baudelaire’s creative poetic process (2007: 150).

Des Esseintes does not look for *correspondences* in nature, but instead perceives *correspondences* between artworks (as necessary in adaptation) or between works and their possible adaptations.<sup>364</sup> Identifying analogies between existing works<sup>365</sup> allows him to collect

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<sup>363</sup> Adaptation in *À rebours* is based on analogical perceptions and their conversion to literary practice, a convertibility of arts which Junod (1976 lecture, quoted in Gamboni, 2011: 130) says rested on the theory of *correspondences*, without which intermedial adaptation would be restricted by medium specificity. Gamboni identifies Huysmans as a “clear adherent” of this doctrine (2011: 130), as evidenced in *À rebours*.

<sup>364</sup> e.g. the bindings which utilise materials that have analogies with the work, or the tableaux such as the ship’s cabin for the Poe text.

<sup>365</sup> Frequently discussed, as in the “grammar” and the “syntax of smells” (Huysmans, 1956: 106-7). The perfume section also sees Des Esseintes creating “scented harmonies” which are homage adaptations, or acknowledged

them into the composite adaptation which is the re-contextualisation of represented fragments of Nature in the architext. Des Esseintes needs the *correspondences* to bind together the collage of Decadent artifice, just as he needs the doctrine of anti-nature and anti-mimesis to free up the flexibility of the unfaithful adaptation which produces Decadent style. Through the aura of the *correspondences* the character also gains insight into aesthetic time, into an atemporality of artworks which is beyond individual versions, a flattened unity of time where memory carries the same weight as the present.<sup>366</sup>

However, while the *correspondences* and their analogical avatars of synaesthesia and adaptation seem to reveal an atemporal ontology through sacred aesthetics, they turn on Baudelaire as they will turn on Des Esseintes. Like the poppy, which is artficed into a form bestowing the illusion of transcendence, the spectres of addiction, solipsism, and decay hide behind the atemporalities of auratic aesthetics in Baudelairean *correspondences*. Where Romanticism exalted the union of the arts, and Symbolism renewed this in the *fin de siècle*, the latter ended in crisis (Gamboni, 2011: 3),<sup>367</sup> a trajectory that can also be traced in *À rebours*. The ideal unity can never actually be reached, with the subject trapped in a *mise-en-abyme* of deferrals, forever irresolute.<sup>368</sup> Nature in its actuality, in its mimetic form, becomes “hideous nature” to the poet (Leahey, 1969: 169), as glimpsed in the return from dreams to reality in various poems by Baudelaire.

The *correspondences* reveal the unseen through the seen, and, in the Hermetic

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remediations (for fidelity is important to him here in its creation of Decadent fellowship) of poetry: “following as closely as possible the admirable arrangement of certain poems by Baudelaire” (Huysmans, 1956: 108-9). He also notes links between authors, such as Poe and Baudelaire (1956: 177).

<sup>366</sup> This is aided by synaesthesia, where the analogies of art forms are mapped to the body, revealing an infinity of mind beyond (Weir, 2015). Synaesthesia transcends the body by showing it as adaptable, and Hubert sees the *correspondences* and their synaesthetic expressions as versions of the past breaking “through the thin veil of the present” (1952: 48), where creative memory becomes part of the system of analogies, a repository of intertexts to be manipulated, and in its analogies with the present, it suggests the desired unity of time.

<sup>367</sup> Gamboni conflates Symbolism and Decadence.

<sup>368</sup> Minahen traces the pathways of Baudelaire’s sphinx intertext across his works, suggesting that this symbol signifies that the unity promised by the *correspondences* is always composite and irresolute (2012). This eternal deferral without meaning also suggests a more literal interpretation of Mallarmé’s demon of analogy.

doctrines, the macrocosm through the microcosm.<sup>369</sup> A certain strain of Modernist curation practice exemplified by those such as Sweeney and Szeemann shows a continuation of the centralisation of analogy that can be traced through Baudelaire and Huysmans, “an aesthetically oriented, modernist version of the Doctrine of *Correspondences*” (Brennan, 2010: 7) that adapts Hermetic metaphysics to aesthetic practice. The Hermetic ideas of transmutation and mediation (Faivre, 1998: 119-120) that can be seen as the ancestry and also a part of the ongoing development of *correspondence* theory were “omnipresent” (Moffitt, 2012: 48) in nineteenth-century France, being famously utilised in Huysmans’ 1891 novel *Là-bas*.<sup>370</sup>

Huysmans’ penchant for mysticism later in his life (Baldick, 1955: 252) is an extension of the aesthetic mysticism which was the doctrine of *correspondences*, describing an enduring connection to these ideas which impacted his adaptive practice. In the series of fragmentary adaptations coming together for the reader as a pattern suggesting broader readings, the revelations engendered by a perceptive ability to read the spaces between things hint at a kind of Hermetic structure to Decadent adaptations. In this, the text is a veil<sup>371</sup> through which a ‘true’ pattern may be glimpsed by the initiate-reader (the palimpsestuous reader) - a pattern predicated on an overlaying of different text-veils, which constitute a palimpsest in their interacting distortions.<sup>372</sup>

The reading-between that is necessary for *fin de siècle* adaptation and Modernist curation is encouraged by the presence of the Hermetic/Baudelairean *correspondences* as aesthetic theory, and the preoccupation with relocating secular aura in an aesthetics not

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<sup>369</sup> Moffitt examines this Hermetic idea frequently (2012: 22, 30, 289).

<sup>370</sup> Moffitt actually sees the post-Romantic period as being defined by a “newly installed Hermetic mythology” (2012: 42). This extends forward into Modernism, becoming important to those such as Duchamp (2012: 11), and creating a thematic thread that runs through Baudelaire, Huysmans, and the Modernist avant-garde (as noted by Bürger (1984: 22/27)), where the mystic artist is “the true modern” (Cheney, 1982: 172).

<sup>371</sup> Recalling Barthes (1977: 159) on the text as woven fabric.

<sup>372</sup> As in Geraghty (2007).



predicated on originals. The spaces between texts would seem to suggest those transitory, fleeting impressions of modernity glimpsed by Baudelaire, where fragmentary experiences offer an intimation of the infinite, the atemporal, and come to signify the kind of secular, Hermetic aesthetics of Modernism (Nicholls, 2008: 5). These also confer those mystical hints at revelation that might refer to a hyperbolic interpretation of hermeneutics, or might be read more metaphysically.<sup>373</sup> Huysmans' tendency towards mysticism may have found its expression in his work via, on a formal level, those systems that rely on revelation through arrangements predicated on analogies such as adaptation and curation.<sup>374</sup> Des Esseintes speaks with his author's voice when he says that the Jesuits "had implanted in him a certain taste for things supernatural which had slowly and imperceptibly taken root in his soul, [and] was now blossoming out in these secluded conditions" (Huysmans, 1956; 74).

Huysmans' adaptations and Sweeney's Modernist curations might be seen to echo each other, for both utilise a museological space underpinned by mystical aesthetics to reveal analogies between objects and texts. For both, a central dimension of their practice is analogical juxtaposition, based in ideas linked to the *correspondences* as schematised analogical insight, and to mysticism through a shared Hermetic heritage (Faivre, 1998: 119). The *correspondences* are concerned with finding sacred analogies, whilst the act of curation is seemingly a practice of arrangement; but the primary part of this practice might actually be seen as the perception of the analogies that allow or encourage a certain arrangement. Adaptation too is seemingly the transmuting, but in terms of creative process, is just as reliant on the process prior to the instantiation. It is the perception that sees in one text an analogy with another; perhaps an imagined, projected text if adapting from a single source, or perhaps

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<sup>373</sup> Huysmans is certainly responsive to this latter dimension, for he carries the latency of mysticism within him, evident in his later beliefs which went beyond the conventionally Catholic (Baldick, 1955: 267), and his obsessions with visionary saints such as Lydwine of Schiedam (see Huysmans' 1901 hagiography).

<sup>374</sup> It might also be seen in the choice of Jan van Ruysbroeck for the epigraph, that "thirteenth century mystic whose prose presented an incomprehensible but attractive amalgam of gloomy ecstasies, tender raptures and violent rages" (Huysmans, 1956: 145).

analogical harmony or dissonance with a context.

The curation/*correspondences*/mysticism nexus is a route particularly taken by those artists carving a space in the midst of modernity (Brennan, 2010), a modernity which is beginning to impinge on Huysmans in *À rebours*. This nexus has been described as spiritual Modernism, a phenomenon emerging at the confluence of “modern art, architecture and the esoteric between [the] 1890-1920s” (Cain, 2016: 2) that saw a re-inscription of a kind of secular mysticism within aesthetics.<sup>375</sup> The resurgence of this theme could be seen as secular cultic practice, an aesthetic metaphysics that grounds transcendent experience in artworks, in the face of the devaluations of both religious and auratic art objects by modernity’s consumerism. This supports the readings of adaptation and curation - artistic processes predicated on intuited connections revealing larger structures of meaning - as routes through which secular aesthetics retain aura and take on some of the significations of religious ritual.

These ideas are revealed most potently between art works; hence adaptations and curations as particularly effective routes. Adaptation, as a textual manifestation of the *correspondences*, can be a mystical revelator, guiding a Hermetic hermeneutics of the unseen through the seen. Indeed, Brennan notes that one of the few aspects of the nineteenth century that was seen as part of a “usable past,” of “a literary and philosophical heritage that could productively underpin Modernist cultural production” (2010: 21), was the thread of spiritual conceptions linked to aesthetics, which became “crucial” to the Modernist project (Cain, 2016: 3). Additionally, it is not difficult to see how adaptation might be the very way to engage with and determine what constitutes such a ‘usable past,’<sup>376</sup> as well as a reformulation of aura promising aesthetic time.

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<sup>375</sup> One example of a formalised version of this might be found in Kandinsky’s *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1914), and there are certainly interesting parallels in the influence of Swedenborg on both Baudelaire and Kandinsky (see Walker, 2014).

<sup>376</sup> Similar to Benjamin’s notion of aesthetic constellation (1999: 340), a mode of encrusting the present with the repressed fragments of the past.

### Adaptive Curation and a Modernist Hermetic Aesthetic

One of the primary mystical facets of aesthetics for *fin de siècle* adapters and Modernist curators is the ability to promote “the viewer’s symbolic ability to occupy multiple temporal and spatial locations “simultaneously” (Brennan, 2010: 6).<sup>377</sup> The reader/viewer is challenged to engage with a reading-between which stimulates conceptual engagement and suggests visionary perspectives of simultaneity, the auratic reception which leads to aesthetic time. Simultaneous perception via the work of art was indeed an important instance of mystical/Hermetic Modernist aesthetics in the avant-garde. Like Mallarmé, Robert Delaunay’s work introduced a “mystical” aim into form, where colours were utilised in an inseparable way so that all had to be perceived simultaneously; the result being an absorption in pictorial simultaneity that prompted revelations of the simultaneity of existence (Spate, 1979: 197).

Adaptations might be seen to perform this function better than many singular instances of textuality due to their constant prompting of the audience into vacillations between texts, places, and time periods, and where – *contra* Dicecco – these spaces overlap to create simultaneity. This drawing together is a kind of transcendence to an omniscient position outside of imagined diegesis, outside of singular textuality; another way that the mystical aspect of the *correspondences* and their transcendent significations map onto the aesthetics of adaptation and its analogies.

The mystical approach to Modernist curation has this same desire to pursue “the artwork’s capacity to engender visionary perspectives” (Brennan, 2010: 7). Here, the spectator will come to inhabit a creative hermeneutic sphere where they will perceive the analogies and the work as process. It is a desacralisation of immersive illusion in favour of a

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<sup>377</sup> This recalls Mallarmé’s (a bridging figure between Decadent writers and Modernism) spatial poetry in *Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard* (1897), where the distribution of words creates a simultaneity between pages, a “defamiliarising juxtaposition” within “ambiguously complicated networks of metaphoric association” (Butler, 1994: 5).

kind of mystical distantiation. The approach is also evident in Huysmans' adaptations, with a focus on aesthetic transcendence on a dual plane; one at the level of the works at hand, the gaps between them, and how these take on thematic resonance; and another at a meta-level. This latter is constituted by analogies between objects and works which draw together multiple spatio-temporalities for the interpretative, reflexive audience. For Des Esseintes, as his own audience experiencing similar versions of the aura of mystical curation's simultaneous time, the use of curation and adaptation as an interrelated nexus of ways to adapt Nature into aesthetic time is evident.

The Modernist curator's application of mysticism to aesthetics suggests some interesting concepts for thinking about the way this aspect works in Huysmans' adaptations. One potentially applicable idea from Modernist mysticism that is relevant here is that of the '*coincidentia oppositorum*,' a concept that seeks to reconcile the tensions of affirmation and negation in various strains of mystical thinking (Voss, 1998: 158). This applies particularly to the core project of mysticism, which is that naming of the unnameable, where radical paradoxes are created by striving "to name a subject that lies beyond words" (Brennan, 2010: 23), becoming linguistically manifest in "corresponding patterns of speaking and unsaying, appearance and disappearance" (2010: 23).

The *coincidentia oppositorum* might perhaps be a way of thinking about those simultaneous negations and affirmations of sources in adaptation, and the liminal space occupied by the reflexive adaptation audience who hold the tension in their minds. An adaptation is *apophatic* in an aesthetic version of the mystical concept, with *apophasis* being an 'unsaying' (Sebastian, 2016: 148) or:

a creative negation that collapses the categorical boundaries distinguishing presence and absence, subjectivism and objectivism, while promoting a movement toward a

kind of radical transcendence (Brennan, 2010: 24).

Similarly, an adaptation speaks of its source through an acknowledgment of its absence, a creative negation collapsing boundaries between texts, creators, and audiences through active reading. The radical transcendence in this sense is that critical reception, the palimpsestuous oscillation which makes the text a *tremplin*, whose auratic reception opens up aesthetic time.<sup>378</sup> Here, the audience is brought into the creative sphere, becoming creators and adapters themselves, as well as part of the process of textuality, active within the text and aware of its construction process. This is adaptation as a mode of enacting mystical *correspondences* within the aesthetic sphere, the textual macrocosm through the microcosm of acknowledgement.

This *apophaticism* seems to summarise effectively the palimpsestic blurrings inherent to adaptations. The “curatorial arena” and its space of display is a “generative void” (Brennan, 2010: 136), just as the micro-spaces between adaptations and their sources are. This paradoxical inversion recalls the mystical tradition through ideas such as St. John of the Cross’ *via negativa* (Sebastian, 2016: 148).<sup>379</sup> Both curatorial and adaptive spaces are responsive to these ideas as sites of simultaneity, of tensions held, of oppositional forces of saying and unsaying. This is what makes them ripe for mystical aesthetics; they engage beyond the materiality of single forms and texts, operating within the interstitial networks between people and things, between the layers of past and present. Since the reception of processes of adaptation and curation depends upon the audience intuiting some of the connections that

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<sup>378</sup> The influence of Schopenhauer can clearly be felt: in this philosopher’s work, the aesthetic experience frees the subject from the universal Will which expresses itself through embodiment. The subject and the object are then able to exist – temporarily – in an aesthetic sphere where they reflect each other as ideals (Schopenhauer, 1988, Vol. 1: 265-271). This is the mystical zone of aesthetic time produced by the Decadent experience of reading the adaptation. This will be further explored as the auratic reception of the memorial *tremplin* fragments in the next chapter.

<sup>379</sup> This latter concept was certainly known to Huysmans through his mystical readings, and indeed may have provided an unconscious template for his own progression to Catholicism through diabolism; working *à rebours* to conversion (Hanson, 1994: 139; Baldick, 1955: 250).

were part of the creation, it is no surprise that they may suggest equally transcendent ideas to the observer as to the artist.

One of the key irresolutions which a Modernist aesthetic mysticism attempts to address is the quest to resolve or juxtapose creatively the sacred and the profane within a secular space of display (Brennan, 2010: 136), rather than merely participating in the “one-way trip” of desacralisation (Gaskell, 2003: 151). This dynamic or tension can be read as allegorised in *À rebours*; Des Esseintes is depicted as searching for an aesthetic mysticism that will allow for an inherency of the profane Nature within the sacred artifice. In this sense, Huysmans prefigures a Modernist paradox, and uses curatorial adaptation, with its analogies of correspondence, as one possible solution, paralleling the way in which a Modernist like Sweeney utilises curation. This may be one manifestation of that impulse which seeks to find a place for the past within the present, a usable past that anchors the modern subject.

In *À rebours* Huysmans is experimenting with this problem via Des Esseintes; and one of the many routes tested is that of adaptation. His conversion perhaps hints that he never found the solution, retreating into Catholicism instead of pursuing the secular mysticism of the museum-space as found in *À rebours*, with its use of curations from the profaned religion to the sacralised aesthetics.<sup>380</sup> The choice was too stark, weighted down by d'Aurevilly's pistol and cross (Baldick, 1955: 136), and too early for the gradations allowed in the “highly ambivalent modernist equation” (Brennan, 2010: 136). However, Huysmans did note the potential for the museum space, and its literary version, with their interpenetrating activities of curation and adaptation to stage the conflict.<sup>381</sup>

In this way, the museum space itself - and the novel that adapts the museum as medium or genre - becomes “an embodiment of the mystical capacity to occupy multiple conceptual domains simultaneously” (Brennan, 2010: 136), a recombinative arena for the

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<sup>380</sup> Gaskell has described these (de)sacralisations as versions of going “against-the-grain” (Gaskell, 2003: 157).

<sup>381</sup> Des Esseintes' own conversion, whilst not definite, appears to be fast approaching.

subject to experience a dynamic convergence, and a visionary conception of simultaneity (Butler, 1994: 164). Curation in *À rebours* represents a method within the adaptation of Nature which reforms it as a collaged adaptation formed from textualised fragments, micro-texts of reality, collected and analogically connected, and creating an auratic, aesthetic time for their reader. Through the *correspondences* between the textual fragments of Nature which form the architext of the retreat, and the way that for Des Esseintes these interlink with memory and the synaesthesia of the body, the subject escapes into authored artifice.

### Chapter Summary

In the previous chapter, the extended and acknowledged adaptation of Nature was argued to adapt that source text as a collection of multiple fragments in varying stages of textualisation. The idea of the collection as a text containing texts, which might be adapted (the forming of the collection being an interpretation) via a recontextualising (or rewriting) has in this chapter been considered as a process of adaptation which bears many similarities with practices of curation. The Decadent adaptation of Nature can be considered as a museum which houses, yet is itself an integral part of, the fragments of the adapted source collage. Both Huysmans and Des Esseintes can be analysed in this way as Decadent adapters, and whilst Des Esseintes' text more easily engages with the figure of the museum, Huysmans' novel can itself be explored as having an analogous structure.

For Huysmans, the adaptation of temporally organised Nature into the aesthetic time of Decadent style takes its predominant form as a museum housing collections, formed from (and forming for the novel) a curated intertextual layer which sits, exposed, on the surface of the novel, pulsing out artifice like radioactivity. It is an encrusting of cited fragments which make up a single text - the adaptation (as palimpsestuous mosaic) - which is the surface of the

notional *ekphrasis* of the architext, and therefore not just an adaptation of a textualised Nature, but an adaptation of a notional adaptation of this.

This chapter has examined a range of ideas which unpack and might be seen to contribute to the particular version of curatorial adaptation which is argued to structure *À rebours* and Des Esseintes' architext. The first of these is a consideration of the ways in which this adaptation is in dialogue with other forms of intertextuality. The Decadent text of artifice which adapts Nature includes an intertextual surface of collected fragments of other works, which are argued to play a large role in acknowledgement via self-reflexivity, as well as holding the Nature/artifice dichotomies in place. These intertexts are part of the collection of fragments which is the source text adapted, but are the more textualised versions which do not include more 'personal' memorial intertexts.

The discussions of Nisard and Naturalism approached the intertextual surface as a collection holding smaller collections, a structure which is itself an adaptation by Huysmans of the conventions of Naturalism found in his previous writing. Individual intertextual fragments have been analysed in terms of their acknowledgement of this personal adaptation. Accompanying the various forms of intertextual citation which are a key part of the collection which is the decayed source text of Nature, transposed to the museological textuality of the novel and objecthood of the house in a recontextualisation which forms a new collection, are micro-adaptations. The example unpacked suggested that the Baudelaire poem 'Anywhere Out of the World' is a micro-adaptation in terms of its synecdochical fragment, its embedding as a compressed version of itself in the larger arrangement of texts in the house and novel. However, this micro-adaptation is explored as actually another thread of fully realised and sustained adaptation which, when activated, becomes the source for each larger text's identity as an adaptation of this.

The interrelationship between these various forms of intertextuality within, and constituting, the curatorial adaptation of Nature was further explored through contextual



influences from Huysmans' experience of French *fin de siècle* culture. The museumification of the home, the rise of collecting culture, and the accession of the *biblot* were all investigated for their influence on the form of adaptation seen in *À rebours*. The notion of aesthetic time, as the central Decadent desire of escape from Nature, is linked to curation as an installation of authorial order.

Aura is posited as a key way to investigate the relationship between collections, curatorial adaptation, and aesthetic time. Aura is the reception context which allows the Decadent Des Esseintes to experience his adaptation of Nature as containing, and as a *tremplin*, inducing a drift such as with the perfumes, where Des Esseintes roams "haphazardly through the dreams conjured up for him by these aromatic stanzas" (Huysmans, 1956: 109). This leads him into a dematerialised text of synaesthesia, imagination, and memory, via its auratic objects on one hand, and via the auratic adaptation on the other. The notion of the adaptation as carrying aura was also suggested to be relevant to the Decadent as a route to aesthetic time.

Decadence's link to Modernist aesthetics allowed this idea to be further investigated, where curation and adaptation as processes stimulating auratic reception deliver the Decadent to an aesthetic time which is atemporal, an aesthetic mysticism. Through Modernist ideas of simultaneity, and the notion of the *correspondences* as a lineage that leads from Baudelaire through Decadence and into Modernism, the mystical aspect of the Decadent textual museum and its fragmentary adaptive practices are shown to push the subject towards an atemporality induced by their adaptation of Nature.

We might go further with these ideas in framing this discussion around the idea of adaptation's conceptual birth under Romantic aesthetics, which meant that it was framed via secondariness and fidelity in the face of celebrated originality. Jellenik says that adaptation emerges from the same moment and cultural pressures as Romanticism, and that it functions as a vital cultural reaction which shaped and developed the shifting definitions of originality

redefined in Romanticism (2017: 37). Decadent writers such as Huysmans might be seen to have broken with Romantic reading strategies which framed adaptation as a fidelity issue, and instead in their practice (though not naming the concept as an abstraction in itself) embodied a variant on Romantic ideals that allowed for fragmented versions of adaptation along with an infidelity impulse.

This may be argued to emerge through the refusal of nature worship (fidelity) in favour of artifice worship (authored similarity with difference), and a reframing of collecting and curating as a viable artistic activity, whether in life, within narrative, or in the construction of novels. Collecting with infidelity encourages the practices of curation and adaptation, creating fragmentary texts derived from fragmented amalgamated sources. It is a Decadent creative act which might be analysed as adaptation, and which goes against the Romantic ideals of adaptation which have been posited as the concept's critical beginnings.

## 5. *Mise-en-scène* and *Ars memoria*

### Chapter Introduction

This chapter posits extended allegorical readings of the narrative of *À rebours* as a dramatisation of the failure of Decadent adaptation to attain its goals. By exploring ideas of textualised or mediatised memory, border zones of Adaptation Studies are scrutinised following the notion that if some versions of reception can be considered adaptation, then an analysis of the process of adapting to memory as a medium becomes a way to consider these links in depth.

The chapter pursues further the ideas of curation, aesthetic time, aura, and mysticism as key attributes and aims for the Decadent adaptation of Nature. Focusing more closely on the narrative content, the Decadent adaptation as experienced by the character is examined for the ways in which it gets close to the arena of mystical aesthetic time through the aura of curatorial adaptation. Unpacking the *mise-en-scène* of objectified texts as the intertextual surface of Des Esseintes' adaptation, and its ability to collect smaller collections, allows an examination of the ways in which these fragments – for the reader who is also the creator – incorporate layers of subjectivity.

This makes these texts palimpsests overlaid by memories, and *tremplins* which can launch the reader into memory through their auratic reception and sensory potency. This is suggested as a version of the *ars memoria* tradition, where memory as a creative practice allows the examination of reception as subjective adaptation, and thinks about the ways in which this becomes threatening for the Decadent subject. In the religious reveries stimulated by Moreau's paintings there is already a hint at the problematic shift that emerges: Des Esseintes begins in "imagination" but quickly confuses this with "memories," where the auratic *tremplins* produce an unstable aesthetic time where fiction and reality blur,

threatening to change the subject (conversion in this case, through the mysticism embedded in the adaptation). This comes via the collapse of Des Esseintes' Decadent retreat, which is shown to become haunted and suffocating because of its structures of adaptation. This is posited as a way that the narrative relates the Decadent ontological experience, which becomes a Gothic loss of identity in a haunted memory palace.

Unconventional versions of adaptation are explored in the tableaux and collections of the *mise-en-scène*, expanding on the beginnings of the previous chapter. The *mise-en-scène* itself is an interesting addition as a collection-text, a fragmentary form which may often be an adaptation of a set of genre conventions or a character's personality or backstory, where notional memory intertexts can similarly be considered as contributing fragments. Here it is not only that analogical links are noted between adaptation and concepts of *mise-en-scène*, *ars memoria*, and the Gothic, but that these bring a deeper understanding of Decadent intentions, and those of Huysmans, whilst diversifying conceptualisations of adaptation, and evoking productive models or new branches of adaptation practice. Similarly, here as elsewhere there is the expansion of aspects of Decadence and Huysmans studies (e.g. the interior and the Gothic) and the adding of new elements (e.g. the memory palace).

The Decadent *mise-en-scène* as a text, as a museological adaptation of fragments, comes into sharper focus in these next assessments of the novel. The *mise-en-scène* is a useful way to analyse not only the curatorial adaptation of Nature into the artificial paradise of the retreat, but also the way that between fragmentary intertexts and the mosaic-whole, there are tableaux texts, specific and discrete arrangements such as the collections discussed at the beginning of the previous chapter.<sup>382</sup> These curated *mises-en-scène*, often themselves micro-adaptations such as the Trappist's room, combine to form the interior of the architext even as they house intertextual fragments. These intermediary texts, that like poems in a collection

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<sup>382</sup> e.g. the Latin library and the Baudelaire triptych.

combine the images of the intertexts, are themselves often responsive to adaptive analysis.

The *mise-en-scène* is perhaps the most quintessentially Decadent medium, serving as the “enunciation” of a spiritual atmosphere (Praz, 1933: 398), and becoming both increasingly displayed and analysed in media forms of the nineteenth century (Sitzia, 2015: 57),<sup>383</sup> as well as being a potent Decadent form in its bridging of art/life divides. Analysis of the interior created by Des Esseintes draws out different discussions compared to the analysis of Huysmans’ adaptations, though the former are part of the latter. Analysing *mise-en-scène* as an adaptive assemblage allows further examination of the Decadent ontologies present in *À rebours*, and their relationships to versions of adaptation.

The *mise-en-scène* of *À rebours*’ diegesis is an authored creation, achieved via a “complex system of *correspondences*, transfer procedures, [and] reflection effects, which turn the Decadent aesthete’s home into an installation which corresponds to his own sensibility” (Mitchievici, 2011: 14); what Baudrillard discussed in the symbolic equivalences between dweller and dwelling (1968: 27).<sup>384</sup> The alterations of the house to create a synthesis between biography and aesthetics might be read as Des Esseintes’ Aestheticist adaptation of the mosaic-text of his own subjectivity to the interiors in an animist curation. This requires the finding of works representative of various obsessions, memories, ideas, and the curation of them as objectified synecdoches. This occurs within a highly-wrought setting of theatrical artifice, a personal *mise-en-scène* which is the visible surface of the adaptation of Nature, pinned together by analogies. Not only is the retreat a distancing adaptation, an intoxication of reality, in its interior it is also an adaptation of the heterocosm of the creating self, where,

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<sup>383</sup> Interiors were becoming increasingly symbolic in relation to characters by the *fin de siècle*. Maleuvre calls them “indoor landscapes” (1999: 124) as the Romantic milieu moves inwards, and domestic framings emerge “as a new *topos* of subjective interiority” (Rice, 2006: 2).

<sup>384</sup> Mitchievici describes the Decadent interior as an archetype, encompassing both the real houses of practitioners such as Moreau, Montesquiou, and Khnopff, as well as the fictions of Decadent artworks. *À rebours* is possibly the most famous of these latter creations, revealing “the dreams and desires of an entire generation of modern Decadent dwellers” (Sitzia, 2015: 57), and recounting an interior which directly expresses a character’s personality.

as for Baudelaire at the Club des Haschischins, identities fuse with the objects which surround them (Hayter, 1968: 157).<sup>385</sup>

In the diegesis of *À rebours*, analogies based on the *correspondences* structure the adaptations of Des Esseintes' interiors; both from the character to his surroundings within the world of the novel, but also on the compositional level of the transpositions which Huysmans utilises to create this world. Progressing from discussions of the curation of interiors within the novel as much as for the novel - where both engage with motivations tied up in aura and aesthetic time - it is interesting to note that both Mitchievici in the description of "transfer procedures," and Zimm in the reference to Des Esseintes' "grand projects of domestic adaptations and transformations" (2004: 305) employ the language of adaptation to describe the character's relationship to his domestic interior. The interior is a text constituted by a multiplicity of fragmentary adaptations; from objective world to alternate, simulated reality, from subjecthood to objecthood. The collections which form the intertextual surface previously examined become particulate contributors to this text of the *mise-en-scène*, itself the visible surface of the architext, which collects them as they collected objectified works as Nature-intertexts.

The narrative in this novel without conventional action or plot has been described as "a mediator between real and imaginary space;" between Des Esseintes' architectural setting and the fragmentary worlds evoked via the atemporal summoning of memory and reverie (Zimm, 2004: 305).<sup>386</sup> This is the narrative version of the aesthetic mysticism which sees

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<sup>385</sup> Similar to the way that Des Esseintes describes the creation of artificial paradises within the body, where the ingestion of certain chemicals means that "it thus becomes a simple matter for anyone to change the colour of his walls without laying a finger on them" (Huysmans, 1956: 15).

<sup>386</sup> Huysmans utilises a particular narrative device, described by Zimm as the '*excitoir*' form (2004: 305), to allow Des Esseintes the potential for the blossoming of memory within the architextual interior. The *excitoir* is the form used by the Goncourts and adapted by Huysmans, where the description of an interior is a mediator between real and imaginary space, moving back and forth from the details of that interior's *mise-en-scène* and the memories and reveries engendered by it for the character. This prompts some of the merging of the subject and the interior, for the subject becomes a constant within "an interior enabling the invention of other interiors" (Zimm, 2004: 305) in crystalline growth. It also allows for the curation of Des Esseintes' memories within the

curation and adaptation as modes promoting the textual simultaneity which transcends the quotidian. The *mise-en-scène* for the character is similarly a carefully written interactive text, or “interface” (Zimm’s term (2004: 305)) tailored (as creator) to his subjectivity (as audience), full of multi-sensory signifiers which are curated together into the mosaic of the adaptation. The auratic reception of this work provokes memories and reflections in an artificial and highly controlled combination of Proust’s voluntary and involuntary memories.<sup>387</sup> The novel is a notionally *ekphrastic* representation of the text created by the Decadent character, and therefore represents the interwoven real/imaginary spaces of the interior of Des Esseintes’ curatorial adaptation as a further stylisation.<sup>388</sup>

The *mise-en-scène* of *À rebours* is actually the foreground of the novel, the surface encrusted with the fragmentary intertexts, as well as a “narcissistic architecture” (Zimm, 2004: 305) which is almost an extension of Des Esseintes’ mind, or a whole of which his body is becoming an interwoven part. This is contrary to the function of *mise-en-scène* as background in most texts, and creates a flattening of the space in which the character dwells. The interior of the house is Des Esseintes’ collection of collections, the surface of the museological adaptation which is an artwork of curated artworks. The primary way in which the notional *ekphrasis* of this work is presented by Huysmans is via the style of the inventory, the discourse of the collection.

The link between the inventory style and the Decadent aesthete recurs throughout

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structure of both works, a mosaic layer in the palimpsest which shows the fact that “the temporal status of any act of memory is always the present” (Huyssen, 1995: 3).

<sup>387</sup> For Proust (another mystical aesthete), involuntary memory was akin to religious experience (Coleman, 1962: 94), and this has been taken up to some degree in the figure of Des Esseintes, who actually tries to repress his inherent religiosity into aura, beneath a palimpsestic overlaying of purely aesthetic versions.

<sup>388</sup> The visuality of Huysmans, as art-critic and the “dominant” force in contemporary painting transposition (Gamboni, 2011: 128) is an important element here. Without this natural tendency towards, and long practice in, intermedial transpositions and *ekphrasis*, Huysmans might not have been able to construct such a memorable, unified, and yet intermedially diverse set for his character. Huysmans’ interdisciplinarity works to create tableaux within the larger *mise-en-scène* of the architext, curatorial arrangements of adapted intertexts linked by lines of analogy, matrices of impressionistic echoes of equivalences, including less textual forms. These tableaux become smaller sets within the larger set of the house, again revealing the honeycombing of *mise-en-abyme* that creates the novel, building larger representations from synecdochical parts.

works such as Goncourt's *La Maison d'artiste*, where the author conceived a 'memoir of things,' the "plotless narrative structure" (Zimm, 2004: 305) which to some degree is adapted in *À rebours*.<sup>389</sup> Des Esseintes embodies that important distinction between the uncritical collector,<sup>390</sup> and the curator whose exhibition is a text. This is made clear through the *mise-en-scène*, where objects are chosen and described based on an implied "qualification" (Mitchievici, 2011: 14) rather than only a "classification." This is where the poetic value of each object can be located, within the system of *correspondences*, the latent signified network of creative agency beyond the individual components. This is the full text, the latent text waiting to be activated by the audience who are able to read between the fragments and perceive the analogies which make the collection into a text and then into an adaptation through auratic reception.

The *mise-en-scène* of Decadent homes has also been described as a theatre stage (Mitchievici, 2011: 17), and there is certainly a strong aspect of this in the flattened artifices of the meticulous arrangements, as well as the form of drama which takes place within. Huysmans has Des Esseintes perform a kind of digressive soliloquy within the third-person framework, speaking his text, his adaptation of Nature aloud. He interweaves the sermon of his aesthetic credo<sup>391</sup> with the memories and reveries which these stimulate, clearly located within and engaging with the intertextual network of surrounding objects and texts, the micro-adaptations and intertextual fragments. *À rebours* often feels like a play set within a museum, where the set becomes Expressionistic to the extent that it is as much a character as the protagonist, or at least as much a part of him as his verbalised musings. This idea also

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<sup>389</sup> Mallarmé's descriptions of the house of Montesquiou (Baldick, 1955: 122) are an additionally significant influence on the interiors of *À rebours* and their relationship to their inhabitant.

<sup>390</sup> Previously mentioned in relation to Zola and Naturalism.

<sup>391</sup> Actually described as a "sermon" by Huysmans in the early instance sketching Des Esseintes' life at Lourps, preaching on Dandyism to his tailors from "an imposing pulpit," and "threatening them with pecuniary excommunication if they did not follow to the letter the instructions contained in his monitories and bulls" (Huysmans, 1956: 12-13).



draws together Huysmans and Des Esseintes as adapting authors in *À rebours*,<sup>392</sup> for it highlights the fact that just as Huysmans stages this work for his readers, he constructs the novel in a way that has Des Esseintes staging the same drama for himself.<sup>393</sup>

Des Esseintes' project is primarily an adaptation, via curatorial recontextualization of varying levels of fragmentary artifice, to the medium of the interior to create the new 'text' of the *mise-en-scène*. However, curated intertexts, even in the micro-adaptations of bibliophilia, retain their media forms within the novel's world; hence the Decadent adaptation to the interior as an unresolved collection of citational fragments. They are not made medially homogenous in the way that the ultimate *ekphrasis* by Huysmans to the form of the novel is, despite existing on this plane. The parts remain parts spatially for Des Esseintes, keeping their original embodiment yet participating in the new text, creating a simultaneity of adaptation, a dual existence that increases the interplay of audience reflexivity between the adapted textual fragments (e.g. a painting) in themselves, united by analogies, and the whole of the interior's visual texture as an adaptation of Nature.

In one particular episode of Decadent *mise-en-scène* creation, Huysmans describes the dining room of Des Esseintes' house, a room designed as a set; a simulation of pure artifice for the spectatorial experience of its creator. The dining room, designed to resemble a ship's cabin, adapts a larger original space by placing a smaller room within it,<sup>394</sup> "like those Japanese boxes that fit one inside the other," and contains a porthole window level with the 'real' room's window, but filled with a large aquarium which filters the light. The modulations effected by this enhance the impressions of a sea voyage given by the décor, and Des Esseintes further manipulates this set or tableau adapting Nature by tinting with "coloured essences"

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<sup>392</sup> Similarly to the way that Zimm (2004: 309) comparatively analyses the methodology of Huysmans and Goncourt in their construction of novelistic interiors, even though only the former are fictional.

<sup>393</sup> The visual dimension is also evoked in the idea of performance, and this is certainly important to the centrality and density of the *mise-en-scène* at Fontenay-aux-Roses and its *ekphrasis*.

<sup>394</sup> An abridgement which defers even that basic spatial reality.

the water of the aquarium, manufacturing the impressions of different seasons or weather systems on the water.

Des Esseintes utilises fragments within this *mise-en-scène* as *tremplins* to attain the imaginative space “between-decks in a brig,” inhaling “the smell of tar which had been introduced to the room before he entered it,” examining prints on the walls, props such as sextants, and the clockwork fish (Huysmans, 1956: 19-20). These are an example of the acknowledgement needed to keep Nature as source in view, so that the interart collage prompting intersensory immersion - which is the auratic reception producing the aesthetic time of the imagined whole, which overlays the room - remains a palimpsest rather than becoming overly immersive and affective.

This is production design,<sup>395</sup> an obsessive organisation that constitutes an adaptation of Nature to a tableau which is a micro-adaptation in *mise-en-abyme*, representing and contributing to the larger adaptation of Nature in the house as a whole. It too is constituted by various curated, micro-adapted, intertextual fragments. It is a collection-text adapting a fragmented and textualised world to a knowingly acknowledged artificial text of ritualised aura, which creates an aesthetic time whilst itself contributing to a larger version as synecdochical part.

This highlights the textuality of Des Esseintes’ house even within his diegetic world, where adaptation becomes a tool for manufacturing artifice, for turning Nature into an artificial, mediated series of representations, strictly controlled and authored. This episode shows the character manufacturing a collaged textual simulation, via manual stimulation of the senses and imaginative bridging. It re-stages Nature as a *mise-en-scène* text, a tableau

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<sup>395</sup> In another example of dressing sets, and due to the fact that it isn’t possible to have automata serve him, Des Esseintes has his housekeeper dress in a Flemish costume as worn by beguines, so that “the shadow of this coif gliding past in the twilight produced an impression of convent life,” meaning that the Decadent is not forced to endure her “commonplace silhouette.” This is an example of the creation of miniature interlocking performances, of adapting Nature according to an ideal, but also of the embedding of the religious desire within these structures. This recalls not only Des Esseintes’ childhood among the Jesuits, but also prefigures Huysmans’ own search for a “peaceful, pious community” that would suit him later in life (Huysmans, 1956: 18-19).

formed from decomposed, fragmented components that are analogies for, or representations of, the source, held together by synaesthetic *correspondences*. It carries a degree of mimetic illusion in its unified, distanced impression, before revealing itself as fragmentary and staged, self-reflexively revelling in ornamented artifice. As with the Trappist's cell - that "facsimile" aiming to break with past memories of lust even as it connects with those of the religious upbringing (Huysmans, 1956: 62) - it is the semblance of a whole, and the simulation of an 'original,' which relies on its perceiver's knowledge of artifice and process.

However, Des Esseintes is not adapting from a coherent reality, even as a memory-intertext in his curation of the dining room. It is more akin to notional *ekphrasis*, for this is not adapting from Nature directly, but from a fictionalised representation of it, a decayed, fragmentary, and composite reality, full of the worms of fiction and illusory memories. Des Esseintes has created a fragmentary material representation of a fictitious and artificial memory, itself constituted by fragments of experience, imagination, and aesthetic reception. On one level, this *mise-en-scène* is an adaptation of the old room by Des Esseintes. On another, it is the adaptation of an invented source-memory, a generative void, a potential memory which works just as effectively for him as a true memory in terms of its potential as a source for adaptation, and is more effective for its distancing chain of artifice which draws closer to aesthetic time.

In the micro-adaptation that is the dining room, Des Esseintes has curated elements with critical creativity into a stylised collage-text of artifice, blurring the past and the present. The *mise-en-scène* becomes a medium of overlapping physical and mental texts, a Decadent practice of life-as-art, where everything is textualised in the combination of Aestheticism and artifice. Des Esseintes experiences the pleasure of the adaptation in his palimpsestuous awareness of process, of the artificial combination of elements, and his auratic reception of distance and ritualised sensory intensity. A collage of texts replace experience, simulating "all

the sensations of a long sea-voyage,”<sup>396</sup> for Des Esseintes considers travel “a waste of time,” when the imagination is capable of providing “a more-than-adequate substitute for the vulgar reality of actual experience” (Huysmans, 1956: 21). Nature in terms of external experience, the uncontrolled present and immediacy of the world on what Des Esseintes calls the “material plane,” is adapted to a version which, in the reception of this text, generates a further version composed at the level of pure imagination, yet generating “pleasures similar in all respects to the pleasure of reality” (Huysmans, 1956: 21).

This adaptive *mise-en-scène* is also noteworthy in its hybridity, its transmediality and synaesthesia. Synaesthesia becomes the road to excess for Des Esseintes, the way to the transcendent simulation that is aesthetic time’s dwell-able textuality. Its ability to overload the senses and turn “neurosis into a spectacle” (Sitzia, 2015: 65) is a revelling in aura produced by set-pieces of *mise-en-scène*, these micro-texts of the interior, what Sitzia describes as “machines” which open up the escapist potential of the artificial architext of aesthetic time. They become a way to tip the balance of the *pharmakon* of the interior’s creation towards manufactured control of aura-production, bringing order to neuroses such as the hallucinated frangipane scent (Huysmans, 1956: 104),<sup>397</sup> with their aestheticised, artificial counterparts.<sup>398</sup>

The Decadent disease becomes a spectacle text for enjoyment through the simulacrum-producing machines, those adaptations of fragments which add up to the architext of the full interior, a curated mosaic of auratic stimuli overlaid by evoked sensory texts in the mind of the character (and the reader’s imagination).<sup>399</sup> Tying together Des Esseintes’ set and

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<sup>396</sup> His version of Baudelaire’s ‘Invitation to the Voyage’ (1869).

<sup>397</sup> Most Decadent texts include and foreground visions and dreams as an important element, according to Lyytikäinen, and these are revelatory moments of sickness for both protagonist and reader (2016: 16).

<sup>398</sup> As in the vaporisers which create the olfactory layer.

<sup>399</sup> The staged interior creates an inter-sensory experience, a simulated spectacle evoking the reproductions of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (Gelfand, 2012), which also created immersive architectural artifices via a diversely collaged sensorium, an adaptation of a sacred space.

acknowledging its nature as a textual collage of other texts, is the appropriately chosen novelistic fragment which maintains the Nature/artifice adaptation relationship. The side-table is “dominated” (Huysmans, 1956: 20) by Poe’s *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838),<sup>400</sup> a book whose narrative is rich with maritime atmosphere. This intertextual anchor is a corporeal symbol in the *mise-en-scène*, an embedding of themes and impressions in a synecdochical prop by Des Esseintes for himself, and Huysmans for his readers. As a bibliophilic micro-adaptation, the text itself and the experience of interacting with it are conflated and held in the mind, and the cited intertext guides the adaptation of which it is a part.<sup>401</sup>

What makes the Poe work truly curated as an object, and demonstrates the active agency of Des Esseintes the adapter playing with networks of intermedial and intertextual analogies, is its arrangement within the set; just as was the case with the Baudelairean Trinity. Within the tableau, the intertext’s impressions of the oceanic sublime harmonise with other props and stimulations to create the fictitious whole of the simulation, the room of artifice, whose boundaries with the mind of its observer are indeterminate, and which is a loose adaptation of the ‘spirit’ of the acknowledged work. The indeterminacy is partially predicated on the way that objects refer outwards towards other objects, and artifices inhere within simulations, rendering the boundaries of Nature textualised and porous - like the dimensions of the adapted room, its original walls obscured by the constructed, artificial walls.

This critical perception and realisation of analogies between conventional and unconventional media effects Des Esseintes’ artistic hybridity,<sup>402</sup> transgressing formal

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<sup>400</sup> Poe for Des Esseintes possessed “better perhaps than anyone else” those “intimate affinities” that could satisfy him (Huysmans, 1956: 175).

<sup>401</sup> Des Esseintes never actually reads (McGuinness, 2003: xxx), but evokes memories of reading stimulated by objectified texts.

<sup>402</sup> Present both in and across media (Potolsky, 2013: 90).

boundaries to allow adaptation as extension of the work.<sup>403</sup> With the Poe text, a visual symbol is extracted and used as watermark, and the objectified novel becomes a kind of ikon, suggesting through its visual stimulation the world it contains, which is a composite of recollected reading experience and the evocations of the new medium. Through analogies between Des Esseintes' reading of this novel, and the form in which he chooses to embody it, he adapts the novel into a symbol, a fragment in the mosaic of his larger adaptation of elements to the full micro-text which is the ship's cabin *mise-en-scène*.

### The Decadent *Mise-en-scène* as Curated Adaptation

In moving from the textuality of the *mise-en-scène* to a consideration of its place within the themes of the novel and its relevance for both character and author, the already mentioned figure of the *pharmakon* might illustrate the way that the perverse Decadent aesthetics of *À rebours* are always a paradox embodying both growth and decay, artwork and symptom.<sup>404</sup> The relationship between Des Esseintes and the simulacra of interiors goes beyond the usual Decadent interiority of that which Gagnier calls "the mirror and the lamp" (2010: 96). Instead, it is addictive, unhealthy, and constantly threatening to tip from pleasure to torture, as with opium<sup>405</sup> in the Baudelaire-mediated intertexts of Poe and De Quincey. The curated interiors of the house at Fontenay are an essential component of both aesthetic mysticism, and the stylising adaptation of Nature which ultimately generates anxiety, due to its inability to find any transcendent destination or internal system of meaning.<sup>406</sup> This is a useful example of the idea of the interior as an anthropological document referring to an

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<sup>403</sup> As in Huysmans' descriptions of the selection of typefaces and paper textures for specific works (1956: 131).

<sup>404</sup> The figure of the *pharmakon* evokes not only a doubled text (as with an adaptation) signifying two different meanings, but also a shaded spectrum, where the two poles are represented by the cure and the poison.

<sup>405</sup> Sitzia too makes this link (2015: 65).

<sup>406</sup> Mitchievici describes this inability to find a coherent system of metaphysical meaning, and its attendant anxiety, as the inevitable route for the Decadent interior (2011: 18).

ontological milieu, part of what Maleuvre calls the nineteenth century's "crisis of dwelling" (1999: 120).

This shows the delicately poised engagement between the Decadent subject and the Decadent aesthetics in *À rebours*; the text of the interior is unstable, carrying the potential of the uncanny in the homely. Huysmans represents this for the reader partially in the descriptive style, which indicates the tensions and the finely balanced conception of the house as beautiful simulation and suffocating mausoleum.<sup>407</sup> The "pointillist catalogues" of surface curations render the home unhomely, as the whole and reality are lost in the cacophony of details, of parts; as the whole "seeks to represent itself absolutely, it loses sight of itself" (Maleuvre, 1999: 142).

This is allegorised in the narrative by the form of Des Esseintes' *mise-en-scène*, where in the example of the dining room, the architecture disappears behind the curated illusion of the 'text,' reflecting the disappearance of Nature behind its crowded adaptation. This is also true of Huysmans' description of the architext, where it becomes impossible to imagine the house as a plan, as a coherent body. Instead it is a minutiae of parts which remain incoherent, while intoxicating the reader with their details.<sup>408</sup> In *À rebours*, this excess creates a shaky structure, a pleasurable accumulation that constantly verges on the anxiogenic in its loss of the whole, moving towards the poisonous end of the spectrum, or from *heimlich* to *unheimlich*.<sup>409</sup> The style of description creates the stifling effect for the reader, mirroring the oppressiveness of Des Esseintes' experience of his textualised interior, and suggesting the

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<sup>407</sup> In his 1834 work, Nisard saw this style, this obsession with detail, as an anatomisation of the material which smothers morality and philosophy (North, 1999: 86), where language, in striving to depict everything, "substitutes images for reality, colours for thoughts" (Nisard, 1908: 6).

<sup>408</sup> A technique derived from Naturalism (Finney, 1986: 73) and Flaubert, similar to the effect of describing young Charles Bovary's new cap (1950: 16).

<sup>409</sup> Freud's notion of the uncanny or *unheimlich* is particularly bound up with the home, which illustrates the idea of the familiar becoming unfamiliar, losing its stable meanings, as well as being the site of Oedipal repression which, for Freud, lies at the heart of this anxiety (Freud, 2003: 134). Similarly, the idea of the shift in Decadent aesthetics, retreat-text, and adaptation from the repression of the external world to oppression of the subject is represented well by the doubleness of the German terminology as discussed by Freud.

reception of the adaptation of Nature to the house of aura and aesthetic time as important communicator of key states of the Decadent ontology.

The uncanny experience suggested by Decadent interiors, and the role that adaptation plays in these, is further revealed in considerations of the intensely subjective nature of the spaces of *À rebours* for the character who experiences them within the narrative world.<sup>410</sup> Des Esseintes is constantly editing his house, tailoring it to be a more complex adaptation of not only Nature, but also his embodied subjectivity and personal taste. Decadent interiors such as those of *À rebours* are predicated on “direct *correspondences*” between the surroundings and the inhabitants (Mitchievici, 2011: 13), driven by the “solipsistic will” (Gagnier, 2010: 90). The concentrated density of the interior in *À rebours* evokes the cinematic iteration of *mise-en-scène* in German Expressionism, as well as the symbolic externalisations of Romantic and Gothic literatures (Botting, 1996: 59).

The latter is an important thread when thinking about the unhomeliness of the Decadent interior and its relationship to its inhabitant, and there are clear parallels between Des Esseintes’ house and the Gothic interiors of Poe<sup>411</sup> in works like *Ligeia* (1838) and *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839).<sup>412</sup> These interiors are a part of the live burial phobia woven

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<sup>410</sup> The Decadent house actually suggests many interesting parallels with the curations of selves and representations of selves in the twenty-first century. Indeed, the relationship between Des Esseintes and his home does perhaps suggest the ways in which online curations of versions of selfhood migrate via an intermedial network of representations, and particularly the way that theories of adaptation might be one route into analysing this phenomenon of the simulacral spaces of the online self, with its various expressive ‘rooms’ on different platforms, utilising collages of diverse media forms.

<sup>411</sup> A link made by Cagliero (2001), among others, while Vines charts Poe’s influence on French writers of the *fin de siècle*. Huysmans places Poe on the intertextual surface by having Des Esseintes discuss his works, and therefore they are also on the intertextual surface of the character’s created text, by being objectified there. We might also trace micro-adaptations in the use of Poe’s *The Philosophy of Furniture* (1840) in Des Esseintes’ explanations of his selection processes.

<sup>412</sup> Des Esseintes has a similarly debilitating sensitivity to Roderick Usher: “ever since his early childhood, he had been tormented by inexplicable revulsions, by shuddering fits which chilled him to the marrow and set his teeth on edge whenever, for instance, he saw a maid wringing out some wet linen. These instinctive reactions had continued down the years, and to this day it still caused him real suffering to hear a piece of stuff being torn in two, to rub his finger over a bit of chalk, to feel the surface of watered silk” (Huysmans, 1956: 79). The character notes this similarity later in the work, a foregrounded intertextual link on the part of Huysmans (1956: 177).



throughout Poe's work,<sup>413</sup> where ornamentations escalate in a mirroring of the characters' anxious psyches.<sup>414</sup> Crowded and oppressive interiors closely linked to the characters they house are certainly a defining element of nineteenth-century Gothic texts (Cavallaro, 2002: 87). They often feature a *mise-en-scène* which is "irrational, obscured, and densely decorated with texts, statuary and images" (Curtis, 2008: 86); a thread which runs through *À rebours* and which also has those associated ideas of being representative of psyches, and ripe for hauntings in the embodiment of the past and the doubling of selves which destabilises identity.

The unsettling effect on the reader or spectator found in the Gothic is often achieved through a fixation on objects, which are imbued with dread by the nature of the narrative gaze (like the lists of *À rebours*), by their links to self and memory, and their part in distorting boundaries. The exterior in the Decadent work is absorbed by the interior "according to a particularly Decadent artificial metabolism" (Mitchievici, 2011: 13),<sup>415</sup> and an assertion certainly attributable to *À rebours* in the process of the adaptation of Nature and the external world. The house distils the world into *bibelots* like a museum absorbing the past. The rooms then overcome the house, destabilising the wholeness of the building through a troglodytic reception fixated on grotesques, and the décor and objects cause the rooms to fade away, 'suspending' space and hiding architecture (Maleuvre, 1999: 147) in the mereological mechanism of Bourget's definition. The Decadent subject in turn absorbs the décor and the objects, drawing them into the mind just as they have been curated based on externalisations of taste from the mind's network of *correspondences*, and its ongoing vacillations between perception, reverie, and memory.

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<sup>413</sup> Mediated for Huysmans by Baudelaire.

<sup>414</sup> The protagonist of *Ligeia* adapts the phantasmagoric text of an opium dream to the *mise-en-scène* of an interior (Hayter, 1968: 139), where the furnishings are fragments making up an intoxicated adaptation of reality, an artificial mourning palace like Des Esseintes' black garden at Lourps.

<sup>415</sup> A metaphor with more than a hint of Huysmans about it in its bodily and gastronomic associations.

In order for the Decadent *mise-en-scène* to externalise the interior of the subject, expressing their taste and their experience, the world as a source text must first be internalised via this interpretive *enfleurage*; distilling reality into *osmazome*. This is recorded in a dense, mediated, decayed form, where it is ornamented with subjective intertexts, before it can be re-projected outwards as auratic dwelling-text, as the artificial paradise evoking aesthetic time. This dual motion is the process of adaptation which creates, for Des Esseintes, the artificial *mise-en-scène* of the refined Thebaid as architext.

There is a sense that within the novel's narrative, Des Esseintes' mind exists as an intermediary medium within the processes of adaptation, a diegetic medium on the same plane as the *mise-en-scène*. Here, physical objects and texts exist as tactile and sensorially dense place-markers, synecdoches for the true conception of them that he holds in his mind in a solipsistic version of Platonic Ideas. This is due to the fact that for all Des Esseintes' reverential materialism, objecthood and the architext can be artificialised further by becoming imagination and memory. This occurs through sensory engagement with evocative textual fragments of artifice that act as auratic *tremplins*. The idea is exemplified in the trip to England, where Des Esseintes, "drunk with fantasy" (Huysmans, 1956: 118) in the intoxicated Nature of artifice, and sensorially prompted into this state by interacting with intertextual surface fragments (in this case Dickens), decides to visit England, only to cancel the trip after visiting an English tavern near the docks. He comes dangerously close to betraying the architext in a return to Nature,<sup>416</sup> but in the end contents himself instead with an imagined version of London, an auratic simulation curated from various paintings and novels, such as

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<sup>416</sup> "Travelling to England in the flesh," the term evoking ideas of embodiment, where the *tremplin* fragments of the adaptation "acting upon him in an unexpected way" (having inverted to betray him after the flowers incident at the book's pivot) almost deliver him to Nature rather than aesthetic time, through the sensory cravings induced by the inversion of the senses-to-reverie trajectory of his conventional auratic reception (Huysmans, 1956: 118).

the “page of Baedeker describing the London art galleries,”<sup>417</sup> as well as the pub as synecdoche.<sup>418</sup>

Nature is deferred initially through the collage of signifying objects (maps, packing particular items), artificial locations (the coach journey, the English pub), and texts (Dickens). Ultimately though, the real journey is cancelled and made artificial by the recomposition in the mind of a *mise-en-scène* of England, a tableau simulation, a micro-adaptation within the architext, though one which almost delivers him back to reality, where his fantasy would have collapsed.<sup>419</sup> Instead, the aura that is his reception of the collage-text of fragments creates the palimpsestuous simulation in his imagination, beyond the house itself.

The transmedial and objectified collection of fragments of artificial Englishness provided by the synecdochical objects and intertexts combine with memory intertexts, interact with the senses, and produce the aura of an aesthetic time of artificial experience. This is the interiorised, adapted text; the simulation projected on the medium of the character’s interior screen. This is one of many voyages which are denials of Nature, important stages in the “perpetual violation of nature” (Calinescu, 1977: 172). The violating text is formed through engagements with fetishised objects, but objects which are signifiers of a mental reconstitution - a further artifice. Objects and texts within the *mise-en-scène* are always referring to the next layer of the palimpsest, which exists only on the plane of Des Esseintes’ mind, where each has a more dynamic existence in its relationship to and stimulation of memory and imagination.

This is the reception of the adaptation from Nature to fragmentary house-text, but

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<sup>417</sup> For he really only desires representations and texts: “after all, what was the good of moving, when a fellow could travel so magnificently sitting in a chair? Wasn’t he already in London, whose smells, weather, citizens, food and even cutlery were all about him? What could he expect to find over there, save fresh disappointments such as he had suffered in Holland?” (Huysmans, 1956: 128).

<sup>418</sup> As Maleuvre says: “*bibelotised* Englishness supplants the actual experience of being in England. When the real and its copy, the *objet* and its *bibelotised* version produce the same stimuli, reality becomes obsolete indeed (1999: 176).”

<sup>419</sup> Indeed, he realises that this repudiation of old convictions must be the result of “some mental aberration” (Huysmans, 1956: 129).

which is also itself a further level of adaptation within the diegesis, where the character adapts sources to the text of the house, but at the same time to the text of his mind (as perception necessarily embeds in memory). Des Esseintes' mind is itself a palimpsest<sup>420</sup> that mirrors the reception of the novel and its adaptations, at the same time as it exists as a constituent part of the novel. The palimpsest of Des Esseintes' mind contains layers of memorised house from his continuous reception of this adaptation that he constantly reads, and in this conflation of previous and current experience, past events which have become memory intertexts are contained, overlaid on objects, texts, or collaged as *tremplin* extensions.

This is seen at the very outset of the novel, where the character remembers (in an initial deferral) past “pleasures which were in a way heightened and intensified by the recollection of past afflictions and bygone troubles.” In order to stimulate this frisson, this recollection, the character has curated a fragment of the bedroom *mise-en-scène*, an object which is a *tremplin* intertext whose sensory reception becomes auratic in its summoning of memory. The object is a “little silver cage containing a cricket which chirped as other crickets had once chirped among the embers in the fireplaces at the Chateau de Lourps” (Huysmans, 1956: 12). Therefore a memory is overlaid upon an object through atemporal analogical connection, and curated as a fragment within a larger *mise-en-scène*, so that the memory it evokes through first sensory engagement (sound) and then auratic reception (immersion in memory), overlays the present as a palimpsest, where in the reading-between that focuses on antithesis, the frisson of rebellion or perversion is evoked for the experiencing audience (Des Esseintes). Des Esseintes explains that the subject must be able to “concentrate [their] attention on a single detail, to forget [themselves] sufficiently to bring about the desired hallucination and so substitute the vision of a reality for the reality itself” (Huysmans, 1956: 22). However, in this view of the way that the focussed reception of a part within a collection

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<sup>420</sup> As it is for De Quincey.

text can bring about the auratic shift from Nature to the artificial paradise of aesthetic time, Des Esseintes does not desire full mimesis, but acknowledged mimesis that includes temporary moments of immersive reception in illusion. This is why the collection includes the *tremplins* that launch the subject out of their present self and into an imagined or memorial version whose palimpsest overlays the interior of the architext.

The palimpsest of mind is then a subjective text to which all of his fragmentary intertexts are adapted as parts within a mutable, unstable whole. For Des Esseintes, the interior of *À rebours* is both physical *mise-en-scène* within the architext (though both, of course, are merely diegetic), but also a mental *mise-en-scène* which complexifies and dialogically rewrites the house and Nature as a triple-layered adaptive palimpsest. Des Esseintes curates objects and works, as representations and adaptations of Nature, to his synecdochical media forms in the medium/text of the *mise-en-scène*, the exposed intertextual surface of the architextual adaptation that is the house at Fontenay. This is simultaneously adapted via a dialogic reception to the medium of his memory,<sup>421</sup> combining the mosaic text with more personal and dematerialised memory intertexts, which then overlay the manifested objects in the house in a palimpsestuous dialogism between interior and exterior.

*À rebours* depicts the house as physical simulation, adapting Nature, which Des Esseintes has curated, but there is an even more artificial simulation, on the virtual level of the character's mind. This vacillates between voluntary and involuntary curations of memory texts; some with a manifested *tremplin* anchor one layer back in the palimpsest, in the physical house. Others are more ephemeral intertexts, formed only of a memory component; the movements between these are what make the refined Thebaid as simulation such an unstable space, suggesting its Gothic resonances.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>421</sup> That "graveyard that the moon abhors" (Baudelaire, 1987: 75).

<sup>422</sup> In considering the aspects of adaptation within the narrative world, it is important to keep in mind Huysmans as creator and puppeteer of Des Esseintes' adaptations; all of the character's adaptations are a part of Huysmans', though the reverse is not true (e.g. the Nisard or Naturalism adaptations).

Des Esseintes' reception of the Decadent *mise-en-scène* - that which makes it a palimpsestuous mosaic incorporating memory intertexts and layerings even as it is inscribed and refined as a memory - is a process of reception as subjective adaptation. The boundaries between the *mise-en-scène* of the house as found in the novel and those of Des Esseintes' mind are indeterminate, shifting, and vague, for we are never sure when a vision will intrude, and at various points in the novel the artificial texts of memory and imagination are given as much validity as the textualised and adapted Nature; as in the 'trip' to England.

We can never be certain whether the spaces inferred in the reading of *À rebours* are the interior of the house or the mind: for Des Esseintes they are both. Des Esseintes' adapting reception becomes fidelity adaptation with an uncanny mimesis due to the dialogism which means that the source (the adaptation) cannot be experienced without the memory intertexts incorporated in reception and induced authorially. The received adaptation and its version in the mind become mirrored, whilst the source texts of the pre-represented Nature are buried deep in the palimpsest. He has further adapted Nature to another layer of artifice in memory.

Here Des Esseintes might wander without being forced to engage the vulgar body, seemingly transcending corporeality, Nature's biological temporality, and its associated embodied media through a fidelity adaptation in active, ornamenting reception that overlays the physical interior. He becomes textualised. The *mise-en-scène* is therefore a symbolic language with more abstract *correspondences* in the mind, but it also exists as a reflection of itself within that mind, imprinted onto its consciousness by the stamp of memory.

Prior to its actualisation in objects, the *mise-en-scène* of the aesthete's carefully arranged interior exists as an imagined text, a pre-instantiated notional adaptation: a script to be embodied. In actualisation, the lines of this layer are traced over by the physicality of the embodiment, the sensory data of the representation from imagination to house. This then becomes, after the stage of embodiment, an internalised textual layer, as the embodied layer is reconstituted in memory, overlaying the pre-embodied imaginative layer. At this stage,

subjectivity enters again, for in this re-internalisation via reception which constitutes the ‘top’ layer on the palimpsest, time and space become completely flexible. Memory and imagination concatenate or elongate both at will, and so the text occupied by the creating/reading subject incorporates porosity between Nature and the pre- and re-adapted texts of the psyche. This version of the text, this specific memorial layer of the palimpsest, is particularly prey to the vicissitudes of subjectivity, to the interplay of intertexts from the archives of the self.

### Gilding the Carapace

Decadent novels feature “a substitution of interiority with the interior” (Mitchievici, 2011: 15), a conflation of internal and external spaces made possible by “delicate affinities,” and “transient states of dissolution and melancholy rapture;” those intoxicating, ritualised reveries of excessive aura. Decadence becomes, for Navarette, a mode of horror in its explorations of this dynamic between inner disorders and outward forms (1998: 41), whether in the narrative world or the style of its relation. In the case of *Des Esseintes*, this substitution of the interior for interiority progresses through the mounting uncanniness generated by the fixation on the *mise-en-scène* (for character and reader), until there is “no longer any distinction” between the inner and the outer (Mitchievici, 2011: 15). The lack of distinction causes memories to become as real as concrete perceptions, and artifice and reality to lose their dyadic fixity, setting up the Gothic thread<sup>423</sup> which embodies the poisonous end of the *pharmakon* spectrum.<sup>424</sup> The stronger the analogical ties between the interior of the mind and the interior of the home - as in the adaptive *mise-en-scène* at Fontenay-aux-Roses - the more

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<sup>423</sup> Navarette has explored the Decadent Gothic in detail and notes the blurring of the real and the artificial, imagined, and remembered, as a key trope (1998: 43).

<sup>424</sup> Curtis, in a chapter on the haunted houses of the nineteenth century, sees this same link, where “the idea of spaces that actualised individuality” and encouraged the curations of “creative customising” (Curtis, 2008: 43) paved the way for haunted and uncanny interiors in cinema, while Gordon posits a clear link between *fin de siècle* interiors and morbid pathologies (1991: 93).

unstable those distinctions between past and present, subjective and objective, become.

For Des Esseintes, interiors and interiority become opposing mirrors, placing the subject within the abyss where reality is lost amid reflections. The adaptation of the outside world and the self to the interior constructs a house of adaptations which corresponds to Elliott's looking-glass analogy, and, caught in this *mise-en-abyme*, meaning decays. The excesses of artifice and analogy, where every object or text has its adaptive echo in another form and is overwritten by a layer of memory, cause the Decadent self to have permeable boundaries. It therefore becomes an animist force pervading objects and texts that are extensions of the self in a manner which threatens a loss of control over identity. This is the *pharmakon* of adapting the self to the text of the interior, as well as adapting Nature to a reductive and artificial re-presentation. It threatens with the potential for pure solipsism, where every exteriority is actually a semblance created within the mind. Pre-empting filmic practice, emotions and memories ghost onto lighting, objects, décor; and the house of Des Esseintes becomes a crumbling self, a becoming-porous like the entropic tale of Poe's house of Usher.<sup>425</sup>

In *À rebours*, the delicate affinities offer only a temporary retreat. Ultimately, they do not deliver the self from Nature, from embodied, bourgeois time; instead they fragment the temporal fixity of the self. Things lose their qualities as external objects where palimpsestuous reading between object and memory is possible. Instead they only refer inwards to memory, a further condensing and eliding of Nature as source which draws the compressed world into a singularity hanging in the gulfs of the self. Nicholls notes that *correspondences* become determined by "personal needs" in *À rebours*, without an order externalised in language or reality, and therefore begin to "paralyse" experience, rather than being a route to explore it, as Nicholls claims they are for Baudelaire (Nicholls, 2008: 54).

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<sup>425</sup> Snow notes the entropic character of this tale (2016: 134).



The *correspondences* cannot effect a complete deliverance of the subject to the poetic unity of the supernatural; instead the adaptation of the natural fails, and “within the heart of elemental Nature, there remains the one inescapable human presence which resists all exorcism: the observer’s self which in all things discerns, as if compulsively, its own reflected image” (Leahey, 1969: 283). The unknown Hermes of ‘Alchimie de la douleur’ (1857) who prompts “these morose, and perverse, transmutations of reality” (Leahey, 1969: 246) is the subject’s reflection, which via the analogies between all, suddenly comes to dominate each aspect of creation, reversing the desired poetic transformation, inverting Midas, where nature turned to gold now turns to iron, and paradises become infernos. Hermes, the god of transformations, whose *correspondences* proffered a transformation of Nature to a unified subjective artwork, instead effects an adaptation of the subject to the base, raw nature.

In the novel’s analogies of the interior, objects and texts become extensions of the sensory organs, hypersensitive and synaesthetic tormentors of the organic source text within which the subject remains trapped, unable to be delivered by auratic reveries, haunted by independent analogies like the frangipane. Des Esseintes has grafted his house onto his mind and body as transhumanist extension, and the body begins to rebel, emerging from its repressing adaptation to produce its own auratic disturbances of the reality it is overlaid by. There is a dual movement of artifice that practices this diffusion at the same time as it simulates the Decadent house within the mind of the subject, so that all borders become porous.

The threat is that in the hall of mirrors created by collapsing time into the aesthetic, where multiple selves live at once, and extending it through analogies found in curated works, the self is lost amid doppelgängers. This is a consequence of the fact that the tie to Nature has been lost under too many layers of artifice, producing an inverted transcendence.<sup>426</sup> The

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<sup>426</sup> Recalling Baudelaire in ‘Alchimie de la douleur’ (1857) where nature, after its authored adaptation, signifies only its author’s depression.

Decadent home has been described as “generative of anxiety,” for “the multiplication of suggestions, sensations and reflections in a room meant to accentuate their echo can become stifling” (Mitchievici, 2011: 17), burying the subject in their own memories (echoing Poe’s interiors), as occurs with Des Esseintes. The domestic may begin to shift towards the sepulchral.<sup>427</sup>

Des Esseintes’ house resembles curiosity museums as Henning describes them, where “the fake [becomes] indistinguishable from the real, the artwork indistinguishable from the museum, and nature and human artifice mimic one another” (Henning, 2006: 153). Gothic narratives have always been concerned with fakery (Hogle, 2012: 496), with returns and doubling.<sup>428</sup> Similarly, both Gothic texts and adaptations might be read as “memorials to a decaying past” (Fiedler, 1966: 129), with their sense of standing in for an absence via fragmentary synecdochical or simulacral representations. Hogle identifies neo-Gothic buildings such as Strawberry Hill or Fonthill as having their inspiration in texts rather than ‘authentic’ realities, as is the case with the house at Fontenay, and the spectres within are “signifiers of signifiers” (Hogle, 2012: 497) effecting a doubled and blurred reality. Adaptations ghostly signifiers of signifiers, textual mournings and hauntings which in Decadent and Gothic texts adapt to and from unconventional media forms.

The adaptations of Nature to artifice, and the conflations of exterior and interior carry the potential to spiral out of control. Under a loss of authorial agency, these may proliferate until everything is a deferral, a simulation, an analogy in another form, and there are no

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<sup>427</sup> Suggesting a live burial in the manner of Pompeii (unearthed 1748), which was a touchstone for the nineteenth century’s literary uncanny (Vidler, 1992: 47), of the mundanities of life steeped in sudden death. Pompeii signified “history suspended, the dream come to life, the past restored in the present” (Vidler, 1992: 47); it is Des Esseintes’ temporal aim grown uncanny. Mediated for Huysmans through Gautier’s *Arria Marcella* (1852), Pompeii, as a repository of the uncanny where place becomes catastrophic for the subject, might have suggested the live burial which appears to be slowly happening to Des Esseintes - a protagonist in the mould of Poe’s - as his interior becomes uncanny and suffocating.

<sup>428</sup> Even in the sense of the Gothic revival in architecture, or the ‘found’ manuscripts of texts such as *The Castle of Otranto* (1764).

certain points around which to navigate.<sup>429</sup> Indeed, a trajectory of incremental loss of control is central to the novel,<sup>430</sup> as sensations move from the intoxicating to the sickly, uncannily reflecting back the Aestheticist cure until it becomes the Gothic poison. Des Esseintes cannot keep the control over the past which is required for the Modernist paradigm. In this sense, the adaptations effected by Des Esseintes in the construction of his architext, make that house haunted through an excess of self, pushing the novel into the terrain of Decadent horror.<sup>431</sup> Des Esseintes found “that he was no longer master in his own house,” for the demon of analogy, a “natural association of ideas” within a space “steeped in a monastic atmosphere and intoxicated by the fumes of incense” had made him “over-excited,” and his religious books and objects “had ended up by driving back the recollections of his life as a young man and bringing out his memories of the years he had spent as a boy with the Jesuit Fathers” (Huysmans, 1956: 73).

Benjamin says that “every passion borders on the chaotic, but the collector’s passion borders on the chaos of memories” (1968: 60), and this is certainly one of the most important ways that the curated simulation fails Des Esseintes. Unbidden memories return alongside the purposefully evoked, like revenants, or Bloom’s *apophrades*; “darkening the living” (1973: 139). They bring with them anxieties, hallucinations, and physical ailments, pushing Des Esseintes back towards reality, and bourgeois time. The “deeply researched, personalised” (Borie, 1987: 71) mystical aesthetic of the ‘refined Thebaid’ collapses under the pressing concerns of Des Esseintes’ body and its temporal cycles, signifiers of transience in the necessary but ‘despised’ functional routines (Donato, 2004: 57). His collection creates the

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<sup>429</sup> Recalling Goethe’s discussions of analogical extremes (1998: 74).

<sup>430</sup> Sitzia sees the Decadent interior as uncovering “the desire of modern dwellers to be entertained and served, to escape reality while being firmly in control” (2015: 66).

<sup>431</sup> That “medium best capable of embodying the symptoms of internal madness and degeneration” (Navarette, 1998: 43).

illusion of a controlled and artificial past, but it is the chaos of uncontrollable memory that returns the deferred disorder, bringing with it the organic deficiencies which signify death.

When control over the animist interior is lost,<sup>432</sup> anxiety enters through the overpowering excess of sensation, through a sense of unmooring within memory and reverie. Des Esseintes experiences this at the end of many of his auratic sensory/aesthetic rituals, and they imply that loss of the stable source texts of Nature (even if textualised), and the body (even if adapted by sensory curation).<sup>433</sup> One example is seen towards the end of Chapter Four, after Des Esseintes has ‘adapted’ the tortoise.

This textualising of a biological body, a Natural intertext, leaves him “perfectly happy,” “gazing at the tortoise where it lay huddled in a corner of the dining room, glittering brightly in the half-light.” Basking in the spectatorial glow of his adapted text, Des Esseintes has a moment of corporeal pleasure, accepting his own body and hunger after the seemingly successful experiment of aesthetic grafting, of micro-adapting Nature in the form of the tortoise. This is a *mise-en-abyme* version of his retreat, and a reflection of what he is attempting with his own body by artificing it through transhumanist extension into the *mise-en-scène* which grants auratic escape into aesthetic time. He suddenly has an unusual “craving for food,” and is soon “dipping slices of toast spread with superlative butter in a cup of tea.” The apparent success in artificing one body settles him within his own, and prompts him into a self-experiment, adapting his body via one of his aura-producing machine-texts (Huysmans, 1956: 44).

This is the mouth organ, the micro-adaptation of the Baudelaire poem ‘Correspondences,’ which is the doctrine of analogies and the underpinning of the Decadent

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<sup>432</sup> Animism too being a frequent nineteenth-century trope of the uncanny (e.g. Vidler, 1992: 53; Freud, 2003: 147), noted intertextually in *À rebours* as Huysmans has Des Esseintes discuss Villiers’ *Vera*, where the power of the will is so great “that it could saturate the atmosphere and impose its beliefs on surrounding objects” (Huysmans, 1956: 178).

<sup>433</sup> Recalling Ellis’ description of Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s fate; that he wandered so far into the world of dreams that he lost his tether to reality (1931).

synaesthetic sensorium as auratic, as delivering the Decadent to the aesthetic time beyond the body through the detachability and exchangeability of senses, which in their analogical links indicate a macrocosm beyond. The mouth organ is a “collection of liqueur casks” which correspond to musical instruments, where by drinking a drop here and there, Des Esseintes is able to play “internal symphonies to himself, [...] providing his palate with sensations analogous to those which music dispenses to the ear” (Huysmans, 1956: 45). Through a series of “erudite experiments” he is able to work within genres such as “mute funeral marches” and “rum-and-vespetro duets,” but also crucially uses this adaptation to itself produce further adaptations:

“He even succeeded in transferring specific pieces of music to his palate, following the composer step-by-step, rendering his intentions, his effects, his shades of expression, by mixing or contrasting related liqueurs, by subtle approximations and cunning combinations” (Huysmans, 1956: 46).

This is an adapter playing with equivalences via a system of analogies modelled on a Baudelairean aesthetic theory embedded in poetic practice. Huysmans has adapted Baudelaire’s theory to this scene, whilst Des Esseintes uses it as a source text whose adaptation becomes a machine producing further adaptations, even if they revel in fidelity across the remediation in a way that suggests something of a lack of adaptive creativity. It is in the unusual and pioneering medium that creativity is found.

On the night of the tortoise adaptation, Des Esseintes does not play his organ, but selects a fragment from its mosaic, one of its analogies (an Irish whiskey) for the consumption which is the reception of this intertext. The *tremplin* nature of this intertext is swiftly made apparent, where a sensorial analogy between it and a memory projects him from the controlled *correspondences* of the mouth organ. “Little by little,” following the “reactions of his

palate" Des Esseintes begins to be "reminded by a striking similarity of smell of memories which had lain dormant for years" (Huysmans, 1956: 46), a shift into the aesthetic time of memory.

From its beginnings in the careful controlling of the senses in the memory of the creation of the taste-texts, by the aura-producing machine of the Baudelaire micro-adaptation,<sup>434</sup> Des Esseintes begins to experience a loss of control. This is the beginning of this key trajectory which represents the narrative of *À rebours*. A Proustian involuntary memory approaches, crossing the indeterminate bridges of analogy between the subjective past and the objective present, the two interiors overlaid in the ritual performance of the mouth organ which so relies on a conflating of sense memories with sense perceptions. The memory is one of undesired sensory recollections, an "acrid, carbolic bouquet" which is an auratic portal, a scent whose analogy with the past "forcibly recalled the identical scent" of the dentist (Huysmans, 1956: 47), an uncontrolled *tremplin* asserting an un-curated memory.

The mimetic adaptation between house and mind via this sense analogy opens the way for the loss of distinction between palimpsestuous layers. Swiftly, Des Esseintes' recollections coalesce; they "converged" with an inevitability, an uncontrollability suggested by the phrase "once started on this track" (1956: 47). Des Esseintes is then plunged into the memory, evidenced clearly by the shift in temporal immediacy of Huysmans' next paragraph: from "this had happened three years ago," there is, at the next indentation, a sudden yet subtle move to "it was a molar [...] in a fever of agony he waited for daylight [...] nursing his jawbone." The memory becomes the reality, the past becomes the present, one interior replaces another, and a curated memory-intertext becomes the whole work. The part becomes the whole in an illustration of Bourget's definition.

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<sup>434</sup> An embedded intertextual acknowledgement of the adaptation of the Baudelairean heterocosm. The idea of works as representing a heterocosm of Baudelaire's work and thought is conveyed in the personal anthology Des Esseintes has printed of his prose poems, where these are described as "a little chapel dedicated to Baudelaire and opening on to the cathedral square of his poems" (Huysmans, 1956: 182), where through works are found larger artistic spaces.

Des Esseintes is submerged in an enveloping and overpowering memory which lasts for two pages of Huysmans' text; he has fallen into the self through the previously controlled analogies of his adaptation which conflates two interiors. Now a further uncontrolled adaptation has occurred; rather than weaving intertexts of memories into the curated text of the *mise-en-scène*, Des Esseintes has, through a loss of agency,<sup>435</sup> had his consciousness absorbed into the intertext of a memory and has lost authorship. When control is lost, the past becomes the present, and the familiar the unfamiliar (Freud, 2003: 148), rather than remaining a fragmentary intertext which may be curated at will (repressed).

When the intertextual part replaces the whole, the adaptation it contributes to loses its acknowledged status, and the audience lose their adaptive reflexivity. Fidelity, the simulacrum, and mechanical reproduction triumph. The chain ends in bodily suffering for Des Esseintes, re-living violent sense memories in a temporality which has become flattened,<sup>436</sup> full of uncanny repetitions<sup>437</sup> where reproductions replace the auratic adaptation. Naturalism also returns in this section, mirroring the return of the past for the author as well as the character, in the descriptions of "great splashes of blood and spittle on the steps" (Huysmans, 1956: 48), intrusions so antithetical to the controlled artificing of the body found in synaesthesia and the enemas of inverted eating. This is an extremely embodied memory, a memory of suffering and abjection in complete contrast to the aestheticised body described in the case of the tortoise and the mouth organ's synaesthesia; the sensorium pushes the subject back into their body, rather than suggesting a zone beyond it.

In this instance, Des Esseintes manages to escape, breaking the "horrid fascination" of "these gruesome reflections," of this "nightmare vision." However, in returning to his artificial paradise from this version of his body intruding from the past he "felt suddenly uneasy about

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<sup>435</sup> Freud's "helplessness" (2003: 144).

<sup>436</sup> Aesthetic time inverted into a returning, repetitive, corporeal trauma.

<sup>437</sup> Freud discusses the link between repetitions and the uncanny (2003: 143).

the tortoise,” which was “still lying absolutely motionless” (Huysmans, 1956: 49). The unease, as a low dread signifying the stirrings of the uncanny within his architext is justified by a concluding augury: the tortoise is dead, killed by the weight of its gilded shell.<sup>438</sup>

Following on from this sequence depicting an affective and embodied memory intertext which becomes suffocating, the tortoise’s death at this juncture is a synecdochical representation of the route Des Esseintes is taking, where the organ and its subsuming memory of bodily suffering are a stage on his way to the Decadent cross. The reassertion of Nature builds from the failed tortoise adaptation, which led to the sensory engagement with the mouth organ fragment, which allowed the body back in through an analogical gate between *tremplin* and memory, as the tortoise was dying. It prefigures the failure of Des Esseintes’ project of adapting Nature to artifice, and is a premonition of his own suffocation. The tortoise shows the character the potential result if he carries on adapting his exterior, conflating his interiors - gilding his carapace, that home-self palimpsest so irrevocably attached by his obsessive analogies, and ornamented with intertextual jewels.

The threat here is that of going too far into solipsism, into the new versions of interiority which were emerging in the *fin de siècle*. This period had not only seen the advent of voice-recording technologies which allowed the dead to speak posthumously for the first time (Harrison, 2003: 151), a technological version of adaptation’s reanimating, temporally mediating, abilities, but also the advent of psychoanalysis, the x-ray, and the cinema.<sup>439</sup> These three “uncanny practices that disturbed notions of surface” (Curtis, 2008: 150), might have evoked ideas of going too deep into the interior, destabilising conceptions of a coherent self.

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<sup>438</sup> Huysmans also piles up the sentences in this ending to emphasise significance, convey heaviness, and link the tortoise, Des Esseintes, and the novel through their stylisations: “accustomed no doubt to a sedentary life, a modest existence spent in the shelter of its humble carapace, it had not been able to bear the dazzling luxury imposed upon it, the glittering cape in which it had been clad, the precious stones which had been used to decorate its shell like a jewelled ciborium” (Huysmans, 1956: 49).

<sup>439</sup> Marie-France David-de Palacio has examined the way that the x-ray was assimilated into the imagination of the *fin de siècle* across various media forms, developing a fascination with the ability see degeneration occurring, and death within life (2016).



Des Esseintes wishes to escape Nature in his adaptive artifices, but a tether needs to remain in order to signify the artifice and retain its pleasure.<sup>440</sup> When the adaptation fails to acknowledge the source, it has the potential to take its place, the double becoming the self and adaptation dissolving through a lack of palimpsestuous activation.<sup>441</sup> Des Esseintes' drama is the inversion of his own project of adapting Nature into artifice, and this dynamic can be read in the structure of his layers of curated adaptations, as well as the surface narrative. When there is nothing but the mind, the Nature/artifice dichotomy fails and the artificial becomes the new uncanny Nature. It moves through Baudrillard's phases of the image, from masking and denaturing reality to becoming pure simulacrum, the hyperreal without the curvature of acknowledgement, where all sources have been resurrected and all is open to curation (Baudrillard, 1994: 2-6).

The carapace of the tortoise is both home and self, just as the room for the Decadent is both an adaptation of the texts of the mind and an adaptation to the mind as medium, a gilded cage that suffocates the subject.<sup>442</sup> Des Esseintes as curator tends to fossils of Nature and his own past, the objects/texts as synecdochical vestiges bricolaged into mosaic-texts like the *mises-en-scène*, even as he himself slowly petrifies. The Decadent subject runs the risk of "transforming not only the home but his very self into a museum piece" (Mitchievici, 2011: 17), embodying the uncanny turn of the curation impulse, where the doubt regarding whether an "apparently animate object really is alive" (Freud, 2003: 135) actually pertains to the self.

Des Esseintes becomes more and more still as he falls further into memory, becoming part of the *mise-en-scène*, a prop in a post-human still life.<sup>443</sup> This environment is too potent

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<sup>440</sup> As explored in Chapter Two.

<sup>441</sup> Baudrillard discusses the failure of imitation and parody in the simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1994: 2), where secondariness cannot hold.

<sup>442</sup> Benjamin describes the dwelling as a casing for the individual in *The Writer of Modern Life*, embedded "together with all his appurtenances, tending his traces as nature tends dead fauna embedded in granite" (Benjamin, 2006: 78).

<sup>443</sup> Where "objecthood triumphs and the subject falls (*cadere, cadaver*) and becomes a corpse or a skull, that is, an object" (Maleuvre, 1999: 143).

for the character to survive, too concentrated; a version of Des Esseintes' creative ideal of the *osmazome* adapted to the museological medium of the *mise-en-scène*. If the relationship between the oppressively beautiful room and the anxious, fragmenting subject can be read as an allegory for the modern urban experience, then the ending must always be unsatisfying, for there is no 'solution' to this condition. Indeed, Des Esseintes is forced to return to the city that can be seen to have followed him,<sup>444</sup> haunting and irrupting into his present from its vestigial embedding in the memorial past.<sup>445</sup>

For Des Esseintes, each simulation, each text within a text ends by taking on the character of Nature in its subsuming mereology and loss of boundaries, and must be adapted again into another artificial level, such as the simulation-text of the England visit. Each "transplant is not enough" (Mitchievici, 2011: 17) for they remain within the artificial order, and are therefore only representations of escape, hyperreal simulacra that actually work to bury him deeper in artifice and gild the carapace further. This increases its heaviness, as his artificing does for the tortoise; the embellishments adapt the natural shell into a lapidary simulation which is a tension between the new representation (jewel bouquet) and the original 'text' of the body.

As with the fatal objectification of his pet, Des Esseintes tends further towards becoming ossified as pure exhibit, eating less and less to become one with the deathly artifice of the house. He is starving Midas; for his pleasures are all self-destructive, and, like the speaker in 'Alchimie de la douleur' (1987: 78), he colours his surroundings with the gilt of his authorial obsessions, successively artificing nature with the self, the objective with the subjective. This only serves to concentrate the versions into an intolerable, suffocating density, a still life or a *nature morte*. His escapes are all strange loops, eternal returns, setting

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<sup>444</sup> "The idolatrous city, which grovelled on its belly, chanting vile songs of praise before the impious tabernacle of the Bank" (Huysmans, 1956: 203).

<sup>445</sup> Or in the imagination, as in the case of London: that "terrifying world of commerce," of "isolating fog," this "ruthless machine which ground to powder millions of poor wretches" (Huysmans, 1956: 120).

up the need for a deliverance from overpowering artifice by outside frameworks of meaning. This is the parabola of adaptation in *À rebours*: a failed attempt at harnessing for transcendence.

The temptation and danger of simulation and simulacra for Decadent adapters is encapsulated in Baudrillard's discussion of the way that Disneyland, with its idea of imagined America, envelopes the visitor in a safe place where time loses all meaning and has been folded into past, present and future (1994). This atemporality is what the Decadent seeks in the simulations of aesthetic time. However, just as representation requires an equivalency between sign and thing, so Decadent artifice requires a differentiation between the layers which constitute the texts of the source and the texts of the adaptation. Otherwise the self is lost in the collapsing temporality, suffocation reveals nothing but the simultaneity of death, and the simulacrum reasserts nature and makes the Decadent retreat porous.

### Haunted Museum, Haunted Hothouse

An example of these ideas can be read in the hothouse flowers and the personified syphilis figure. This comes at the centre of the novel and is the pivot for the uncanny turn. It comes after the build up of two key aspects for making the house uncanny: the involuntary memories, and the re-embodiment of illness,<sup>446</sup> where two forms of Des Esseintes' past life in Nature are returning to him, and which are drawn together by the flowers, which allow them to flourish. Emerging from the auratic zone of *correspondences* produced by the micro-adaptation of the mouth organ as an attempted adapting repression of the body and its sensorium, Nature and the body begin to return via affective memories, through a series of chapters detailing the inverting adaptation of the retreat and its *tremplin* fragments. The

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<sup>446</sup> Des Esseintes' neuralgic pains "were coming back in a different form and affecting every part of his body" (Huysmans, 1956: 80).

uncanny turn is reached in the middle of Chapter Eight, where Des Esseintes falls into a dream, another *excitoir* space unfurling, where “he was walking along the middle of a path through a forest” (Huysmans, 1884: 88). This recalls the opening to the *Inferno* (Alighieri, 1472), and indeed, as the seemingly controlled forest of the hothouse becomes the fully natural one of the dream, Des Esseintes’ artificial paradise begins to invert into a natural hell. This vision arrives after the *À rebours* adaptations of the flowers.

In these we see the blurring of palimpsest layers and the collapse of adaptation, as nature and artifice become confused, revealing a displaced agency that indicates either the desire to become artifice felt by nature,<sup>447</sup> or a dissociative misreading of the adaptations by Des Esseintes. The descriptions of the flowers take the reader through the idea of adaptation in nature inspired by human artifice (like Des Esseintes’ wish for his ossifying body), blooms that adapt themselves in order to mimic the arts of humanity.<sup>448</sup> In this reversal of the artificialising arts of the man-made in the novel, nature undertakes adaptations.

The flowers are paradoxical<sup>449</sup> - an inversion of an inversion which make artifice natural through post-human adaptations. They seem to be parodic in their inversion of Des Esseintes’ project, and at first appear as an excellently ironic addition to his simulation. However, from beneath the surface, they effect a rupturing of the gilt veneers and an irruption of the organic. The organic is part of the nexus of dread at the centre of the Decadent ontology, denied and repressed even in the title of the novel, and bound up with those other entangled ideas of Nature, such as temporality, modernity, and the body.

Weir says that the natural is escaped in *À rebours* either through the flight into artifice, or through a refining of the natural until it becomes unnatural (Weir, 1995: 92-93). In terms

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<sup>447</sup> A will-to-stasis or death drive that recalls the carapace and the self as exhibit.

<sup>448</sup> An idea linking back to the discussions of Gautier in Chapter Three, and forward to Wilde in *The Decay of Lying* (1891).

<sup>449</sup> The centrality of paradoxes to Decadent aesthetics has been traced by Riffaterre (1999), as well as the prevalence of parody (a form analogous to adaptation).

of Huysmans' authorship, this latter route is seen in the notional *ekphrases* of the flowers,<sup>450</sup> which become unnatural through their description via a parodic version of painterly *ekphrasis* (Stead, 2004: 261), well-matched to the description of flowers, yet overlaid with an impressionistic description of disease symptoms.

They are described variously as looking "as if [...] fashioned out of the pleura of an ox or the diaphanous bladder of a pig," flaunting "leaves the colour of raw meat [...] puffy leaves that seemed to be sweating blood and wine." They thrust their "ghastly pink blossoms out of cotton-wool compresses, like the stumps of amputated limbs," opening "sword-shaped petals to reveal gaping flesh wounds," and with features like "a human tongue bent back with the string stretched tight, just as you may see it depicted in the plates of medical works dealing with diseases of the throat and mouth." They are "mottled with roseola, damasked with darte [...] pitted with ulcers and embossed with chancres," seeming to be "covered with dressings of various sorts, coated with black mercurial lard, plastered with green belladonna ointment, dusted over with the yellow flakes of iodoform powder" (Huysmans, 1956: 84-5).

The two strains together create the frisson of the paradox, and turn classical nature word-painting *À rebours*, revealing the hideousness of the organic, and drawing out the parody in the use of the *ekphrastic* form. The paradoxes here create monsters (Stead, 2004: 261), changing the perception of normal objects and making them chimerical. For Des Esseintes the flowers are material monsters, first examined for their grotesqueness, and described in a way that echoes Huysmans' later hagiography of St. Lydwine in its Dolorist poring over the symptoms of apparent suffering. Here though, as always in *À rebours*, the mysticism suffered for is aesthetic rather than theological.

The uncanny can be seen to enter through the confusions of artifice and nature that make objectivity and the Nature/artifice, source/adaptation delineation unstable. The flowers are first evoked via Des Esseintes' praise of his previous tastes for fully artificial and mimetic

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<sup>450</sup> Arguably *ekphrastic* representations in their description as texts.

authored flowers, whose pleasure is that of the simulation adapting Nature, and the unusual point of iconoclasm through fidelity. However, these became too commonplace a predilection for Des Esseintes, and he decided to invert the inversion, adapt the adaptation, and find “natural flowers that would look like fakes” (Huysmans, 1956: 83). This leads him into the realms of instability, into a microcosmic version of that loss of reality generated through the tensions and blurrings constructed between the interior and his interiority.

Des Esseintes obsesses over these “supreme masterpieces of artifice” (Huysmans, 1956: 85), the artifices of nature, inverting the anti-natural theme via his reception of these texts. This is a reception where ‘artifice’ is constructed by his own subjective perception of visual analogies between these plants and other materials. The artificing is therefore an illusion, a simulated artifice, and a natural reality which he only perceived as artifice - an artifice of an artifice may become Nature if it moves far enough from the first level of simulation, and an adaptation of an adaptation may subsume either the former or the ‘original.’

Des Esseintes moves from a discussion of nature’s adaptations (in the textual and biological sense) of human forms, to a return to praising the adaptive agency of human artifice. He begins to analyse the plants in terms of their adaptive aura; considering the morphology of their adaptations along a chain of versions, but crucially now in relation to the authorship of horticulturists. Considering nature’s attempts as clumsy yet worthy, he sets up humanity as “master” (Huysmans, 1956: 88),<sup>451</sup> whose artificial methods of altering soil chemistry, utilising crossings, cutting, and grafts, create true inventiveness - and, most importantly, true artistic control. Authorial agency brings controlled adaptation with wilful infidelity - true adaptive artifice - to a worthy yet inconsistent source text, forming it into a palimpsest which is an aesthetic object fit for Decadent contemplation. The flowers in this sense become another synecdochical image for the adaptation of Nature. This is also the route

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<sup>451</sup> In an echo of the artificial dogma set out early in the novel and examined in Chapter Three here.

to escape identified by Weir as refining nature into artifice (1995: 92-93), finding a way into Decadence through Nature.<sup>452</sup> The plants are here described as monsters created by man from nature's raw material, Nature manipulated out of reality and controlled into monstrosity, its texts adapted.<sup>453</sup>

The floriculture which creates the monstrous hybrid is a process of adaptation in the same style as the *bibelotisation* which draws the world, the external, into the interior and its *mise-en-scène*. Sitzia sees *À rebours'* monsters as transformations of the authentic to the inauthentic via this *bibelotisation*, turning the interior into a spectacle of *bibelotised* nature (2015: 67). This is a repression of Nature which, in the context of the Decadent ontology and its proto-Freudian psyche/interior, is fated to return. Like the syphilis through which the first shipment of flowers is described, Nature lies dormant in this discussion, seemingly tamed but merely waiting.<sup>454</sup> The syphilitic flowers are described in terms of Nature's adaptations, and then repressed by the discussions of horticultural agency. However, they can be seen to revenge themselves on their owner by insinuating themselves into his sensorium even while he contemplates their subservience, creating a bodily effect which allows dread to build and the novel to turn on its subject.

The mass of the flowers, represented by their multiple pages of description without reference to human agency, have dominated the subject and his short paragraphs of control. They begin to stifle Des Esseintes, working beneath his conscious musings regarding their repression by human adaptation. The results of natural adaptation (perfumes) begin to effect Des Esseintes' body (their biological analogue). The moment of discussion of adaptive repression of nature's instinctive adaptations does not cover the insidious effect which is

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<sup>452</sup> Like Baudelaire and Huysmans' routes to Catholicism via diabolism - going *à rebours* (Hanson, 1994: 139).

<sup>453</sup> Sitzia sees these as embodying tensions between science and dreams (2015: 66), and being a counterpart to the 'machines' such as the mouth organ, which represent the other route in Weir's dichotomy; the flight into artifice (1995: 92-93).

<sup>454</sup> It also recalls Mary Shelley's creature in its manipulation of the organic into monstrosity, and certainly, Des Esseintes' adaptations (directed as usual, not undertaken by his own hands) will turn on their creator.

taking hold of Des Esseintes, who is again becoming *bibelotised* by his *bibelotisations*. He has allowed root Nature into the house of artifice, a non-textualised source which is larger than a mere fragment within an artifying collection-text. Worse still, he has perceived these 'originals' as mimetic adaptations, Natural *bibelots*, prior to refining his conception in the horticultural line of thought. Nature and mimesis - in one tangle, in the flowers that look to him like artificial materials - have entered the refined Thebaid. The fragments of Nature begin to grow, these inversions of inversions that are organic, that signify transience, also return him to his own body through sensory overload.

The uncanny is let in by the multiple doppelgängers which Des Esseintes allows into his mind and his house, those flowers which are both original and (in his perception) mimetic; reproductions, rather than true adaptations which embrace authorial agency and artificial difference.<sup>455</sup> The figure evokes the traumatic past (Freud, 2003: 142-143), again inverting the project via the aim of aesthetic time, where Des Esseintes planned to use intertexts of the past to "rejoice beyond the bounds of time" (Van Ruysbroeck, epigraph for *À rebours*). However, his desires are *pharmaka*, as we have seen,<sup>456</sup> and become corrupt. Des Esseintes failed to heed the warning<sup>457</sup> to quit his books, his representations and introspections, and now he faces the result; growing "double." Memories creep in with the flattening mimeses, with the destabilising reversals of the flowers, and the internal and the past becomes the external and the present<sup>458</sup> for Des Esseintes without the acknowledgement of palimpsestuous delineation.

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<sup>455</sup> The doppelgänger as a term was first used in 1796, in Jean Paul's novella *Siebenkäs*, and gained currency during the nineteenth century "when new attitudes to irrational impulses began to suggest that destructive forces may be located internally" (Curtis, 2008: 157).

<sup>456</sup> e.g. "once again, he told himself, the solitude he had longed for so ardently and finally obtained had resulted in appalling unhappiness" (Huysmans, 1956: 118).

<sup>457</sup> From Wordsworth's 'The Tables Turned' (1798).

<sup>458</sup> Even in the *Prologue* Huysmans constructs connections between nature and the past for Des Esseintes, where as a child he spends much time "exploring the local countryside" due to parental neglect (Huysmans, 1956: 5), a useful idea for interpretations of trauma repressed and reasserting itself through Nature within the retreat.



The flowers signify the emptiness of Nature's time for the subject, which has been repressed in auratic aesthetic time, and therefore the doppelgänger takes on its Freudian symbolism as embodied harbinger of death (Freud, 2003: 142). Memories begin to steal into the seemingly objective space for the character, living intertexts, culminating in another immersive dream which becomes the character's present, based in the past trauma of his syphilitic infection.<sup>459</sup> The dream enters through the door opened by the doppelgänger flowers and their stifling atmosphere which sends Des Esseintes to sleep. The flowers, whose concealment of (or lack of human/artificial) adaptive agency makes them uncannily mimetic, are adaptations-without-adapters; a shattering of the solipsistic sphere of control. The associations of the memories are pre-empted before the dream in the symbols that cling to the plants: from a cluster of palm leaves emerges a stamen shaped like a "bishop's crozier" (Huysmans, 1956: 86), suggesting that Des Esseintes' Jesuit memories are returning to haunt again, a memory returning hidden and unbidden, within the Natural, rather than artificially stimulated and controlled.<sup>460</sup>

After the crozier is evoked, the reader encounters with Des Esseintes a number of carnivorous plants; "vegetable ghouls" (Huysmans, 1956: 86), which are described in terms of their interiors that are both enticing and deadly. On one level, these embody the misogyny generated by Huysmans' fear of syphilis<sup>461</sup> and Des Esseintes' actual syphilitic trauma. On another, proceeding from the first memorial symbol, and immediately prior to the dream -

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<sup>459</sup> Perhaps inspired by Baudelaire.

<sup>460</sup> The opposition between the attempts at control and the returning tide of memory is found in the chapter prior to the flowers which builds towards it as the turning point where memories become physically affecting. In the previous chapter Des Esseintes immerses himself in his Latin studies again "in the hope of effacing every sign, every trace of these recollections" (initially random memory fragments), but is soon attacked by a second phase, "dominated by memories of his youth, and particularly the years he had spent with the Jesuit Fathers." The significance is suggested by the fact that "these memories were of a more distant period, yet they were clearer than the others, engraved more deeply and enduringly in his mind," and their connection to repressed Nature is established through the organic: "the thickly wooded park, the long paths, the flower-beds, the benches – all the material details were conjured up before him" (Huysmans, 1956: 71).

<sup>461</sup> Perhaps due in part to the soup-seller of his school days, who frequently showed the young Huysmans images of syphilis-ravaged bodies (Baldick, 1955: 29).

they seem to evoke Des Esseintes' architextual interior of indeterminacy. They hint at the character of the Nature/memory palimpsest that he has created through adaptation, that hides its hostility to its creator-reader in the soft opulence of curated Aestheticism.

There is "the downy-rimmed Fly-trap of the Antilles, with its digestive secretions and its curved spikes that interlock to form a grille over any insect it imprisons" (Huysmans, 1884: 86), and the dappled pitcher resembling both a porcelain pipe and a bird's nest "displaying an interior carpeted with hairs" (1956: 86). Couched between these 'beauties,' as Des Esseintes describes them, is a mention of "voracious gullets," and it is in the conjunction between these that we see the representation of the house of curated memories which Des Esseintes has built for himself. Here, the beautiful decorations of the past, apparently artificial and controlled fragments and layers within the mosaic palimpsest, actually hide a maw of memory that will digest its inhabitant, mere sustenance for the walls (Maleuvre, 1999: 144) of the failed *gesamtkunstwerk* of the house at Fontenay, which has become "the sepulchre of art" (Villar, 2006: 8). Des Esseintes, after the initial trigger which is the delivery and death of the tortoise which allows the uncured embodied memory of the dentist in, begins to be dissolved within himself, where "he had to live on himself, to feed on his own substance" (Huysmans, 1956: 70).

In this respect, Des Esseintes' "sole occupation is his physical degeneration, his becoming-object in the mausolean home" (Maleuvre, 1999: 144), where the living becomes a text of non-meaning, a *bibelot*. He becomes the tortoise, that 'monster' which is the logical end of *bibelotisation* (Sitzia, 2015: 67), life subsumed to sustain illusion and spectacle, with the interior as monstrous machine. This vessel of pure surface - the objectified subject - signifies uncanny, empty repetitions in bourgeois time, rather than the progression of gradual alteration which is adaptation.

The pitcher plant has an "umbilical cord" (Huysmans, 1956: 86) in the next stage of the descriptions with their mounting intensity, again suggesting that the past is turning on Des

Esseintes, returning in metaphorical guise. The static structure of artifice begins to take on the ramifying forms of the organic, growing and metamorphosing to engulf the subject. Huysmans wrote that he was creating a character representing a race “devoured by memories of a religious childhood” (Hanson, 1994: 129), and the devouring of the subject by Nature’s time is in full effect here once the architext becomes uncanny. Memory turns, allowing trauma and existential dread to emerge in an engulfing reverie.

The next plant is the trigger, the orchid with the “unpleasantly reminiscent odour,” its “toy-box smell that brought back horrid memories” which Des Esseintes “almost regretted having admitted among all the scentless plants” (Huysmans, 1956: 87). Memories are killing, according to Beckett’s narrator in *The Expelled* (1945), and, in stages, Des Esseintes is edging closer to their threat. The reminiscent orchid pushes Des Esseintes back into his reflections on the syphilitic mimesis of the plants as a whole collection, dwelling on the corrupt adaptation that they have effected. It is this uncanny mirroring, this logically impossible adaptation of the artificial by the natural, that brings back the repressed organic in a Freudian resurfacing.<sup>462</sup> This returns to signify time and death, emerging through the doppelgänger adaptations turned *a rebours*.<sup>463</sup> Just as the scent of the flowers overpowers Des Esseintes and stifles him to sleep, emerging from beneath the controlling agency of the human adaptations, so memories return from the curated past and become physically affecting and sensorially dominant.

In his essay on the palimpsest, De Quincey says that suffocation<sup>464</sup> forces the mind uncontrollably back into memory, the ‘life flashing before the eyes’ of cliché, a compulsive

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<sup>462</sup> Corresponding to the return of the repressed in the uncanny (Freud, 2003: 147).

<sup>463</sup> Inversions of inversions - an artifice too far - which are therefore uncanny mimetic repetitions.

<sup>464</sup> De Quincey associates the palimpsest with Hermes Trismegistus, linking the Hermetic and the hermeneutic in the active archaeological reading, the uncovering of what lay hidden. In this sense, the mystical potential of adaptation as a textual process of palimpsest-creation is evident. Also relevant is the ability of the process to allegorise repressed content in half-acknowledged texts, as well as the idea that adaptations are textual figures for memory, with a shared structure. De Quincey uses the palimpsest as a figure to explore the workings of memory. In its mystical associations, for De Quincey the palimpsest resurrects prior texts when activated, proffering thaumaturgical revelations in its readings. A palimpsest may conjure forth a ghost from the medium in order to have it speak, like Samuel summoned from time’s palimpsest by the hermeneutic thaumaturgy of the

hermeneutics of the palimpsest's obscured layers, and a self-reading inspired by trauma. He says that like "light falling upon light, the endless strata have covered up each other in forgetfulness," but that through the experience of dying, of fever, or intoxication, the strata of the memory palimpsest can be perceived, for "they are not dead, but sleeping" (1845). This is what Des Esseintes can be seen to be experiencing in his suffocations within the museum, where the flowers assail him and induce a stifling faint (Huysmans, 1956: 88), as the Natural becomes a catalyst for the uncanny turn of the Gothic interior of the Decadent adaptation.

Suffocation causes a "simultaneity" by its "dread line of revelation" according to De Quincey (1845), an inverted mysticism which appropriates structures to reveal only a lack of meaning in the "resurrection" of the past. The simultaneity present in the mysticism of aesthetic time inverts too as Des Esseintes is plunged into the depths of the self by his suffocating carapace: the palimpsest is made opaque and reception simultaneous.<sup>465</sup> Des Esseintes, suffocating under the artificial intoxication of adapted Nature that is his heavy *mise-en-scène*, with its in-built layers of memory, is forced back into a simultaneity of memory which becomes simulacral, uncanny, because it no longer has the mereological part/whole structure which signifies layers of artifice. He has lost touch with the compass of the intertextual layer, the chains of adaptation which have been replaced by Natural intertexts in the flowers. Like De Quincey, the initial splendours of Des Esseintes' visions, which had the infinity of memory and imagination (signified by fragmentariness in the mosaic) within which to roam, shrink to "coffin-pinnacles of pagodas" and "narrow chambers buried in the heart of pyramids" (Hayter, 1968: 97),<sup>466</sup> lined with mirrors.

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Witch of Endor. Whether texts or memories (both being temporal records), where others see the surface, the adaptive reader perceives more complex truths through a series of veils, where the shadows of history reconstruct temporal architectures, revealing lost stairways and hidden corridors between the layers.

<sup>465</sup> Opium does this artificially, and it is itself a slow suffocation under addiction. Adaptation too may perform this artificial version for a textualised memory (different to the moments of 'traumatic' critical insight which reveal connections exposing layers), being a revelator of past lives through the memorial vestiges of texts.

<sup>466</sup> These are the descriptions Hayter uses to summarise De Quincey's later opium dreams.

Des Esseintes is afflicted by “a sudden vision of the unceasing torments inflicted on humanity by the virus of distant ages [i.e. syphilis]” (Huysmans, 1956: 87), a corrupt past rushing into the space of his present through this pre-text. This prefigures the end of the novel, for both there and in this vision his sacred solipsism is shattered, and he is thrust back into the throng of the masses. As the flowers have reversed the artificial adaptations he revels in, allowing un-curated Nature back into the temple of artifice, so they allow the full past to return, not the safe curated past of the adaptation. Syphilis is the biological ornamentation and decay that is the negative of the Decadent version, the uncanny mirror of the artifice. It crowns its victims with “an alme’s diadem of sequins,” with “spots of gold” (1956: 87) that are nature’s deathly gilding. Like a wolf in sheep’s clothing, Nature, cloaked by biological adaptation in the trappings of artifice, has physically infiltrated the architext as a tableau of intertextual fragments, and as a corrupt *tremplin* of a bad infinity, has also infiltrated the parallel text of the mind.<sup>467</sup>

Des Esseintes falls into a reverie, debating the adaptations effected by Nature, adapting her plants to appear as artificial texts; “engrossed in a single subject, as if wound up by a spring, his mind went on paying out its chain even in sleep, and he soon fell victim to the sombre fantasies of a nightmare” (Huysmans, 1956: 88/9). He is prey to an embodied vision of disease, the rider who turns to reveal “an equivocal, sexless creature with a green skin and terrifying eyes of a cold, clear blue shining out from under purple lids; there were pustules all around its mouth” (Huysmans, 1956: 89). It clamps him to his body in sensory intensity, “forcing its way under his closed eyelids, gliding down his clammy back and travelling over the whole of his body.” Even here the demon of analogy remains, “his reasoning mania,” as he finds a woman who swiftly morphs from Flower into Virus, becoming an abject vision of

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<sup>467</sup> Lyytikäinen has examined an analogous Decadent case in Kilpi’s *Antinous* (1903): “Even when the bodily realities are absent from the purified visions, aesthetic bliss cannot be maintained. Kilpi’s *Antinous* is betrayed by his own thoughts: the melancholic sees horror through the veil of beauty. In the end, the female monster enters the scene to strike the final blow” (2016: 22).

female sexuality as, “pale with horror, he saw the savage Nidularium blossoming between her uplifted thighs, with its swordblades gaping open to expose the bloody depths,” where in coming close to touching “the hideous flesh-wound of this plant,” Des Esseintes feels “life ebbing away from him” (Huysmans, 1956: 90-92). His nightmare is the turning point which accelerates the psychosis and corporeal illness that will eventually return him to reality, to society, to Nature, to time.

After this hallucinatory horror, the next chapter sees him steeped in memories of the flesh, in fecundity and the associated organic transience. Like the tortoise, the plants - as another symbol of Nature - die, becoming augury. Nature has fractured the palace of artifice and released the curated past from its shackles. Slowly, with its nexus of corporeal time ending in death, the memories within the palace become more and more affecting for Des Esseintes, and his adaptation of Nature to the palimpsestuous text of house/mind alongside memory intertexts, where everything is a text, means that when curation fails, there is no boundary between the interior and the exterior to stop the mimetic, uncanny, repressed past from becoming a suffocating present simultaneity. The architext moves with the parabola of an addict, from euphoria to nightmare, from Baudelairean *paradis artificiel* to *enfer artificiel*, and recalls Book 4 of *Paradise Lost*:

Which way I fly is Hell; my self am Hell;  
 And in the lowest deep a lower deep  
 Still threatening to devour me opens wide  
 (Milton, 1667)

## Gothic Memory Palaces: Decadent Adaptation and the Art of Memory

The artificial hell, which begins to take hold intermittently after the syphilis dream, is characterised by the hauntings of memory; memory freed from the strictures of adaptive curation, where it was interwoven with and within artworks to create the *mise-en-scène*. Memory in its involuntary sense begins to impinge after the tortoise incident, progressing through Auguste Langlois and the chapter of lovers. It is temporarily arrested by the gallery, by Salome as singularly effective *tremplin*, but the next chapter sees “the confused mass of reading and meditation that he had accumulated since he had been on his own like a barrage to hold back the current of old memories [...] suddenly [...] carried away, and the flood was let loose, sweeping away the present and the future, submerging everything under the waters of the past, covering his mind with a great expanse of melancholy” (Huysmans, 1956: 70). This chapter (Seven), which sees the return of memory prefigured earlier by the embodied dentist memory and its tortoise allegory, prepares the ground for the flowers, which draw the memories into the sensorium, opening the auratic channels to embodied memories which, with the uncanny turn, begin to corrupt the body in their hauntings, and therefore return the subject to a tormented materiality.

As previously observed, haunting metaphors of textuality have “extensive currency” (Curtis, 2008: 13), and are a useful figure for investigating the way that adaptive fragments shake off authorial control to become vehicles for uncanny returns in the Gothic turn of the Decadent ontology in *À rebours*. Curtis sees “any attempt to communicate with the past through excavation, exegesis or hermeneutics” as a form of confronting ghosts (2008: 79), and reading for adaptation is so often an examination of absences<sup>468</sup> - indeed, adaptations are

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<sup>468</sup> Curtis says that “reading for ghosts and haunting is a similar strategy to reading for significant absences” (2008: 218), and it is telling how resonant this association is for adaptive criticism too.

haunted texts where the past inheres in the present<sup>469</sup> - that it is therefore no surprise that adaptations might become the medium through which hauntings can be manifested.<sup>470</sup> This is especially true within the narrative of *À rebours*, where texts and memories overlap.<sup>471</sup>

As noted by De Quincey previously, palimpsests carry a thaumaturgical potential, where adaptation becomes necromancy, able to raise ghosts in its excavations of the past, its séances with the shades of the *apophrades*. Des Esseintes' house, as an adaptation, is a palimpsest, like all haunted houses. In the narrative world of *À rebours*, the *mise-en-scène* has overlaid Nature with atemporal artifice, yet in each case the previous layers are not fully erased and may return as hauntings through the archaeology of palimpsestuous hermeneutics. Des Esseintes' auratic reception in aesthetic atemporality is a necromantic raising of ghosts from his own past. The uncanny aspect occurs when the lines of layering are lost, embodying the spectres as a new Nature.

For Des Esseintes, the line of the *excitoir* disappears, allowing memories to impinge on the physical space of the *mise-en-scène*. The memories, in their intertextual nature within the palimpsest text of the mind, are able to intrude with a degree of affective reality. This is due to the flattening processes of textualisation which emanate from the obsession with artificialisation, of which adaptation is a part. This imparts to both objects and memories such an injection of subjectivity and textuality that they become indistinguishable from similar versions, which might be usually divided by clear lines of reality. This is the return of repressed mimesis (repressed by the agency of curation and adaptation) which causes the

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<sup>469</sup> Adaptations contain a heightened degree of those phantom audience experiences ascribed to film, where viewing draws the individual into a realm of fragments where the image is ghostly (Perez, 1998: 429), present and yet remote.

<sup>470</sup> Elliott (2003: 163-4) and Hutcheon (2006: 6) have both noted the parallels between hauntings and adaptive palimpsests, as has Hillis-Miller, with the 'ghost effect' of intertextual hauntings in realist novels (2005: 129), and Bloom in the *apophrades* (1973). Griffiths calls adaptations "arguably the most haunted of all art forms, spectrally incarnating Jacques Derrida's reading of the haunted nature of any canonical work's recreation at the hands of its would-be artistic heirs" (2013: 10).

<sup>471</sup> The Gothic as concept and architecture also relies on a sense of "accumulation over time" (Curtis, 2008: 79), just as palimpsestuous adaptations do.



simulacrum to become real, threatening the coherence of the subject.<sup>472</sup>

Des Esseintes' palimpsest of house and mind becomes a haunted dwelling through the artificing of which adaptation is a key part. Simulacra create Gothic subjects, for they threaten the stability of categories such as 'real' and 'imaginary' (Baudrillard, 1994: 171). With its Gothic resonances, a narrative like *À rebours* might also be seen to be a part of what Hogle sees as the move from simulation to pure hyperreal simulacrum in the significations of Gothic narratives under the increasing influence of mechanical reproduction (2012: 503). The Gothic texts which reveal the instability of signs through their engagements with simulacra as a response to modernity could be seen as similar to *À rebours* in these respects. Des Esseintes' ghosts emerge from and contribute to related aspects of permeable boundaries which destabilise categories; in this case, those of temporally-organised selfhood. Decadent adaptations also create the same "hyperreality" (2012: 503) of signifiers-of-signifiers as those which Hogle identifies as the shifting Gothic 'ghost of the counterfeit.'

In the internalising adaptation which is the transference to memory,<sup>473</sup> material previously trapped within the structures of an embodied work becomes porous and malleable, able to interact with the new medium of memory upon which it has been inscribed. This might end up in figures from works adapted to memory walking the halls of the memory palace, or, if the memory palace has been instantiated in the physical exterior of a house's interior, *à la* Des Esseintes, those figures may seem to walk in the character's world (like the ghost walking out of the portrait in *The Castle of Otranto*), through the now permeable layers of diegesis.

In imagining the effects of memorising the entirety of a text, Frances Yates wonders whether the attempt would have conjured characters into a semblance of life, allowing them "to wander [...] through the palaces of memory" (1966: 130), taking up residence in the mind

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<sup>472</sup> Perhaps also interpretable as an Oedipal anxiety on the part of Huysmans in relation to the repressed intertext of Naturalism.

<sup>473</sup> Recalling the ideas of reception as adaptation in Chapter One, which requires a medium to adapt to.

of a memorialist. This hints at the levelling quality of subjective adaptations, of palimpsest works whose layers are drawn alternately from mind and exterior texts, and the loss of control over the fictional which might occur. For the Decadent character who melds art and life like Des Esseintes, this might be a world where they must cohabit with their memorial ghosts within the text they have created around them, and Huysmans' novels frequently feature this device of purposefully invoked memories which break free from the intention of their curations.<sup>474</sup>

After the hothouse, once the uncanny turn of the Decadent retreat and its trajectory<sup>475</sup> for the subject has become threatening, we see precisely this movement from reverie and memory into the world. During the trip to England, as Des Esseintes sits in the pub, experiencing his micro-adaptation of fragments including Dickens, the environment stupefies his senses and causes an auratic drift. The Dickens *tremplin*, through this reception, becomes the whole in a "daydream." Then, the Dickens characters from the "astonishingly precise and detailed" reverie "stepped right out of his memory to take their places in the Bodega" (Huysmans, 1956: 123-4). Even after leaving the retreat, the mechanism persists, for the adaptive method is the same, and the memory palace remains.

A loss of control over the artificial memory certainly seems apposite in describing what is happening to Des Esseintes in the Gothic blurrings effected by his curatorial adaptation that includes memory intertexts, stimulated to excess by the confusing reversals found in the plants. In the "congealed symbolic content" (Curtis, 2008: 40) of the nineteenth-century interior, the addiction to curating a *mise-en-scène* becomes a symptom of insanity, with Thomas Carlyle seeing the results in the ability of the 'Fine Arts' to "walk abroad without keepers [...] and do fantastic tricks equal to any in Bedlam" (Carlyle, 1850: 703). Curtis also

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<sup>474</sup> As noted by Antosh (1986: 58).

<sup>475</sup> Reading adaptation > *tremplin* fragment > auratic reception > aesthetic time, becomes reading adaptation > *tremplin* fragment > overwhelming sensory experience > loss of reality in uncontrolled memory or reverie > embodiment.

calls it a madness, a “fantasia of allusion and appropriation” (2008: 41), where synaesthesia becomes a “riot” in its excess of *correspondences* (Nicholls, 2008: 54), with these comments clearly indicating the potential for hauntings in the spaces of the nineteenth-century interior. This is particularly true for Des Esseintes, whose excesses have allowed the fantasia to stop signifying itself as such, due to the proliferations of the allusions and appropriations. The fine arts have been melded with subjective memories, and ghostly composites walk abroad without keepers. As Antosh describes: objects “betray” the character, and fragments of memories follow on until the past is “resurrected” (1986: 67).

This is exemplified by the figure of syphilis, for “once memories and dreams, the dead and ghosts become technologically reproducible” - as in Des Esseintes’ summonings of memory via analogies which bind the past to objects/artworks of the present, technologically doubling them as micro-adaptations - “readers and writers no longer need the powers of hallucination” (Kittler, 1999: 10). Simultaneity, induced by the suffocating interior, means that hallucinations have lost their delineations, and have become real. Intertexts of the past walk the halls of memory, which themselves overlay the home. The haunting of the memory palace generates the ultimate *unheimlich*, beyond the haunted domestic house.<sup>476</sup> It draws the uncanny haunting even further into the interior of the self.

The ‘art of memory’ provides the structuring aspect of process for the memory palace as creative product.<sup>477</sup> The earliest tie between the art of memory and ideas of adaptation comes in Simonides of Keos, who was both one of the first recorded as employing an interart analogy - when he described painting as ‘mute poetry’ - and also, to realise and record “the principles of the art of memory” (Yates, 1966: 17). The *ars memoria* referred to imaginative

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<sup>476</sup> Itself the most popular *topos* of the nineteenth-century uncanny (Vidler, 1992: 17).

<sup>477</sup> Emily Cohen has connected the memory palace to the Gothic tradition, productively linking together a network of backward glances, re-collecting, and a personal search for the sacred in writers seeking to avoid the anxiety of emptiness. Her work sees Gothic authors such as Beckford, Radcliffe, and Lewis as creating personal histories via a museological worldview that accumulates memories and objects in the same manner as Des Esseintes, often expressing their obsessively constructed pasts in interiors (1995).

and personal mnemonic systems anchored in symbolic mental images, complex and usually “architectural” (1966: 18) spatial imagery held in the mind in order to retain vast tracts of data.

The fact that it is in Simonides that we find both the first recorded instance of interart analogy, and the first recorded detailing of the art of memory, is for Yates “significant” (1966: 42). His place at the beginning of the histories of both *ekphrasis* as early adaptation, and memory as a formal rhetorical practice, hint at the importance of analogy (Coleman, 1992: 454) as “common denominator” (Yates, 1966: 42) for both of these. This suggests some of those ties between the functions and processes of the two, with the art of memory as a potential type of adaptation, which can contribute to an examination of the adaptation undertaken by Des Esseintes in the narrative of *À rebours* – as well as its haunting and Gothic significance.

The art of memory works to recall an idea or matrix of concepts via an image, and it is in the act of association, that activates a hidden signified text from the lower layers of the palimpsest of memory, that we see analogy as the structuring aspect of the art of memory. It is the line between the visual buoy and the net below holding the relevant text or concept. Thomas Aquinas called these analogies ‘similitudes’ (1947: Part 1, Q.12), perceptions of correspondence between the symbol and the idea. The connections must be strong subjective analogies coloured by personal experience that will serve to recall the ephemeral text which has been mapped onto the deep recesses of the memory, beneath the conscious imagery of the memory palace. The adaptation present in the art of memory as creative process is the creation of the image based on analogies with the recalled text, a kind of reverse *ekphrasis*, a micro-adaptation within the larger text of the memory palace, the museological medium. The art of memory relies on an adaptation to memorial image, structured by analogical perception

and creativity, in order for the subjective reception of this *tremplin* fragment, the re-tracing of the line of correspondence that summons the concept or series of ideas from the image.<sup>478</sup>

Analogical thinking is at the heart of the construction of motifs based on association and metaphor needed for imagistic mnemonics, and it also constitutes the interart analogy, the perceiving of ‘similitudes’ between forms (Coleman, 1992: 454), and subsequent creative mapping, that is therefore necessary for adaptation.<sup>479</sup> Cicero, in *De Oratore* (1939: 357), claims that the common denominator between interart analogy and the art of memory was Simonides’ discovery of the predominant importance of the sense of sight, where the talent for strong mental visualisation anchors mnemonics. Also suggested here is a pre-actualisation stage of envisioning in artistic creation across all media, where both painter and poet work to express in different media what began as a visual conception. Thus the “elusive relations with other arts which run all through the history of the art of memory” are shown to be “already present in the legendary source,” through Simonides’ revelation of the essential nature of “intense visualisation” (Yates, 1966: 43), and the analogies which allow it to be represented in other media.

Huysmans shares this idea of the visual conception of the work that is then adapted to other forms by the author, based on his interart heritage,<sup>480</sup> as well as the predilection for

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<sup>478</sup> Des Esseintes’ paperweight provides an example of the *ars memoria* at work through the auratic reception of *tremplin* fragments within the adaptation that is the *mise-en-scène*. This object “stirred up in [Des Esseintes] a whole swarm of memories. Set in motion by the sight of this little curio, his thoughts went from Fontenay to Paris, to the old curiosity shop where he had bought it, then back to the Thermes museum; and he conjured up a mental picture of the ivory astrolabe while his eyes continued to dwell, though now unseeingly, on the copper astrolabe on his desk. Then, still in memory, he left the Museum and went for a stroll through the city streets, wandering along the Rue de Sommerard and the Boulevard Saint-Michel, turning off into the adjoining streets and stopping outside certain establishments whose multiplicity and peculiar appearance had often struck him. Beginning with an astrolabe, this mental excursion ended up in the low taverns of the Latin Quarter” (Huysmans, 1956: 159).

<sup>479</sup> In this confluence we see the importance of *correspondence* thinking for insight (Gardner, 1983: 279; Mithen, 1998: 77), and for the functioning of memory; in fact, Hofstadter and Sander have posited analogy as the very ‘fuel and fire of thinking’ (2013). Elliott also explores this in depth in relation to conceptualising adaptation where analogy brings understanding across systems and the rapid learning of new ones (2003: 15).

<sup>480</sup> Huysmans’ father was a painter, and the author described his motivation for writing as wishing to paint with words (Baldick, 1955: 22).

analogies.<sup>481</sup> In its reliance on the same principles, it might be suggested that the art of memory is actually an adaptation, an embedding of source texts needing to be memorised (intertexts which become micro-adaptations) within the ephemeral medium of the memory, which takes on the architectural framework to house them. This is similar to Des Esseintes' creation of a palimpsestic interior; the internalisation of an architectural interior space of display upon which can be hung specific catalogues of information. This recalls De Quincey's dream fugues,<sup>482</sup> which form an intermediate text which in some ways functions as a script to be manifested, yet for De Quincey was already so coherent a refinement of the world that it is treated more as a version requiring an intermedial adaptation to literature.<sup>483</sup> Des Esseintes uses artworks as mnemonic prompts (Ziegler, 2004: 340), auratic *tremplins* for affective reveries and, more importantly, curated memories which create aesthetic time.

In fact, it might be argued that the art of memory as a mode of subjective, curatorial adaptation is actually a central part of the creative method employed by Des Esseintes to form his architext and its curated *mise-en-scène*. The art of memory is a model for how the highly idiosyncratic, museological Decadent *mise-en-scène* is created by the character in *À rebours*. It unites the types of adaptation found in the *mise-en-scène*, in the curation of fragments, with the museum house in the sense of the layers of textuality built up by Des Esseintes: a mode of intensely subjective adaptation progressing further from Nature whilst keeping it in view.

In the Classical art of memory, the memorialist would select an architectural space, either real or imagined, and internalise the interior, in order to be able to 'walk' through the spaces, past the various loci or memorial images which were constructed or embedded there.

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<sup>481</sup> As explored by Pasco (2016).

<sup>482</sup> Which Hayter has examined (1968: 103/127) in terms of a breakdown of the creative process, and pre-manifested textualities, where life is the raw material which must first be represented in dreams via the intoxications of reality brought by the artificial fragmentation and reworking stimulated by opium. *En rade* similarly presents dreams as artworks.

<sup>483</sup> A concept echoed in Baudelaire's discussions of sketching, which also relied on a memory source decomposed and rearranged by personal intertexts (Grotta, 2015: 95).

In a famous description of the method by Quintilian (1856: 221-225), the building should be as spacious and varied as possible, whilst the loci should be spaced out regularly and lighted well, just as would be the case in later museums.<sup>484</sup> These resonances cannot be incidental, for both spaces seek that same goal of recalling a past vividly. Ornaments and decorations should not be omitted, but should either be used as loci themselves, or as guides for progression to aid the memorialist.<sup>485</sup>

In Quintilian; the custodian images that constitute the loci may be objects, artworks, tableaux, and should be specifically ordered, for “we have to think of the ancient orator as moving in imagination through his memory building whilst he is making his speech, drawing from the memorised places the images he has placed on them” (Yates, 1966: 18). Loci should be solitary, of moderate size, variegated, and personal; they should also be of striking visual impact, with degrees of strangeness, use of colour, and shock value all employed to embed them with more fixity. What is clear here is the authored and essentially artificial nature of the art of memory. The Greeks made a clear differentiation between the intensely visual, curated, and shaped artificial memory; cultivated through training; and the recollective memory (Yates, 1966: 48, Carruthers, 1992: 46). When it shifts from the former to the latter, it becomes fidelity adaptation: mimetic and uncontrollable, as in Des Esseintes’ personal flowers of evil. The recollective memory, as noted by Aristotle in ‘On Memory’ from the *Parva Naturalia*, contained none of the deliberateness and mental effort - what might be considered authorship - that the art of memory inherently held within the process of use, of consciously

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<sup>484</sup> Des Esseintes’ ground floor, which “demanded a good many [pictures] to cover its bare walls” is set out clearly by Huysmans, and represents a useful hermitage of *tremplin* works which double it as a memory palace (Huysmans, 1956: 57).

<sup>485</sup> For Huysmans in his constructions of Des Esseintes’ memory palace, this was surely influenced by the advent of photography, which encouraged associations around the way that memory might be imprinted on surfaces and objects (Curtis, 2008: 67), establishing links to the past in a medial version of the *ars memoria*. Haunted narratives are often about exactly this phenomenon, about a “process of exorcism” (2008: 67) where the *mise-en-scène* must be interrogated for the memories consigned to objects, images, and documents which are the root of the haunting. It is clear to see how the combination of the *ars memoria* with the Decadent ontology of decay between the subjective and the real interior might produce Gothic narratives of haunted architexts.

moving through the space and utilising association to find the contents (1930).<sup>486</sup>

The architext of Des Esseintes is a memory palace, in that its *mise-en-scène* exists as a mnemonic palimpsest, a text constructed from layers of mental and physical texts that build up to become objects, hovering somewhere between reality and the memory of the individual. Its objects are mnemonic in that they act as prompts for Des Esseintes' aesthetic doctrines as he guides us through the palace, and as *tremplins* launching him into aesthetic time. The object/text loci are also symbolic repositories for both the source texts of Nature, and the memories of Des Esseintes' past life. He lives in a constant state of reverie/recollection, in his doubled space of both house and mind, summoning up the spectres of the past via objects within the palimpsest. His house is built on the analogies of similitudes, and his danger is that the architectural framework chosen for his memory palace is the very one that he lives within; an uncanny fidelity remediation to memory that produces ghosts.

Des Esseintes' adaptations are a version of the art of memory, and his memory palace is also a mourning palace, a perpetual black banquet and aestheticised funeral rite for a life that seems to be behind him. His life has been adapted to a *mise-en-scène*, a symbolic façade that opens to allow the past to return in auratic reception, a reverse adaptation of the object back to the memory for which it has become a symbol. The obsessive memorialising in objects and artworks is a parody of materialism and collecting, insinuating a culture whose *biblot* worship is a representation of a lost past, and an ineffective, cheap mourning for that loss. It is also an Aestheticist appropriation of sacramentalism, an embedding of a sacralised (lived) past in symbolic objects, which, when triggered in the intoxications of ritual, recall for the secular believer the sacred, auratic past in the empty present. The process of symbolisation and recollection is the art of memory, and it is an adaptive art, but the Decadent version is one which becomes corrupt.

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<sup>486</sup> This recalls not only Benjamin and Proust, and the insistence on the artifice of human agency as the prime condition for art found in Baudelaire and Huysmans, but also the intentionality necessary for adaptation (Hutcheon, 2006: 105-111).



The creation of a memory palace is exactly the creation of a carefully controlled *mise-en-scène*, or personal museum full of micro-adaptations housing memorialised texts or textualised memories, as undertaken by Des Esseintes. “Memory rooms” (Yates, 1966: 117; Carruthers, 1992: 282) often appeared in memory treatises, described in inventory style: subjective, static spaces devoid of characters - a collection of bizarre artificial set-pieces. In the same way, Des Esseintes’ house could easily be a house purely within his mind, each room a composed interior of frozen forms, of individual, theatrical set pieces, artificially constructed and linked by invisible threads of analogy. In the memory palace, it might be a memorised speech or religious work, in the refined Thebaid, it is an aesthetic sermon of individual taste.

The creation of the whole is an artistic text, an adaptation of location or architecture, but it is the parts that really matter, that are there to stimulate the memorialist. For Des Esseintes, it might be the books, setting off a lecture on historical Decadence; or the paintings, launching him into creative internal *ekphrasis*; or the mouth organ, stimulating explorations of interart analogy and synaesthesia. All are stops along the path that is his sermon on artifice (his adaptation of Nature), and all are synaesthetic memory loci, *tremplin* intertexts manifesting a theme, an idea.<sup>487</sup> Des Esseintes has adapted Nature, his ideas, his influences, and his memories to a collage of object-texts, curated them within a distinct doubled *mise-en-scène*, employed to evoke reverie and memory along a sermonising journey which is a reading aloud from an architext encoded in the memory, yet also dwelt within.

It is not only a memory palace for Des Esseintes; for in the way that Huysmans has chosen to express the memory palace of this Decadent character as an *ekphrasis*, another *ars memoria* tradition is evidenced. This is the listing, the inventory nature of the memory treatise. This form again combines the idea of the memory palace with that of the museum or private collection, as well as being a perfect fit for the *fin de siècle* vogue for catalogue

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<sup>487</sup> Like De Quincey, the memorialist is “a houser of memories but also a reader of houses” (Wilson, 2016: 8), vacillating in palimpsestuous reading between the architectural spaces.

works.<sup>488</sup> Huysmans uses this form, but employs it in a deeper and more symbolic manner through his character, a mode that actually structures it as an art of memory for an imagined individual, rather than just an imagined or real collection. In terms of Des Esseintes' diegetic world, the space of the primary adaptation - that of the house - disappears from view in the obsession with interior detail and a surface made up of intertexts, micro-adaptations, and palimpsestuous memory-loci objects.<sup>489</sup> Maleuvre sees the idea of the interior disappearing behind the details in *fin de siècle* settings as turning realism back against itself (1999: 140), and as harbinger of the uncanny, making the home unhomely.

The tradition of the memory treatise, the "long lists of objects" recommended for use in artificial memory (Yates, 1966: 115) emerged in the medieval period as prefabricated loci which might be adapted for use by the memorialist, and derived from a similar tradition of "miscellanies of objects" (1966: 115). These are utilised both for storing information and for versions of creative composition, embodying an interesting conflation for the conception of curatorial adaptation as a memorial practice in *À rebours*. Carruthers discusses the doubled purpose in terms of the verb *tractare* (1992: 108), implying both an extraction in terms of reading, and a genre of composition. Here, the memory palace is a liminal medium adapted to

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<sup>488</sup> Such as Balzac and Goncourt's itineraries of interiors (Maleuvre, 1999: 120).

<sup>489</sup> The adaptation of a real building to a fiction whose unity collapses under the panoply of details recurs in Huysmans' later works too. *La cathédrale* (1898) is a sustained and obsessive adaptation to novel of Chartres cathedral, an *ekphrasis* resulting in a Catholic bestseller coming significantly after *À rebours*. Despite its record sales for Huysmans, it is another work where the sense of the building and novel's wholeness is lost due to the incredible multiplicity of densely described detail; where the body dies under the encrusted surface. The result of the adaptation of a building that relied on such a vast compendium of parts was that many of the pages were reduced "to little more than a dry list of names and facts" (Baldick, 1955: 348), with Huysmans himself admitting that it made for arid and penitential reading (Daoust, 1950: 134). Again, the novel as a remediation of architecture collapses under the excessive weight of detail; in the case of *La cathédrale* it evokes the experience of monkish penitence in the reader. In *À rebours*, it suggests the collapse of meaning in the uncanny Decadent home. *En rade* would take up a similar position to *À rebours* with its central adaptation of the Château de Lourps as reflection of the mind of Jacques Marles, where Gothic details mediate between the reality of the château and the Decadent fantasies and nightmares (themselves based on *ekphrases* of the works of Odilon Redon (Grigorian, 2008: 221)) of the protagonist. *Là-bas* also included brief forays into the fragmented Château de Tiffauges as opulent setting for the madness and hauntings of Gilles de Rais. Whilst the 1898 novel is a Catholic repository, the three Decadent buildings of the 1884-1892 novels share the same Gothic properties of reflecting the psyche, mediating between fantasy and the real, and providing a conduit for hauntings via creating an indeterminate space, a vague and uncanny architecture.

and from; a museum in the medium of memory that houses a collection which becomes a palimpsestuous reception collage via the activations of memory, and may be collapsed down again and instantiated as published inventory.

For the Hermeticist memorialists like Giordano Bruno, the art of memory was a route to holding a representation of the macrocosm within the microcosm of the body, transcending the latter through memory. Incredibly complex systems of loci were employed as mnemonics for compilations of everything known to the sciences of the day, thereby achieving a unity only possible through the conceptions of memory. For Des Esseintes, the memory palace is the place of the aesthetic macrocosm of which the physical world of his house is a microcosm. The Hermetic mysteries for the Decadent are purely aesthetic, they are the disembodied creation uncorrupted by materiality, the auratic reception of the adaptation, a level of artifice beyond. The macrocosm contains the interior of the house, but it also contains the memorial intertexts.

It is the doubling effected by the dialogism which overlays the memory palace on the interior that causes the failure of aesthetic time. This certainly returns us to Gothic works, frequently concerned with unstable texts (Mishra, 1994: 134), collaged narratives centred around narrators with a loose grasp on reality. In these, “the ‘overwriting’ and juxtaposition of texts” are often at the basis of the hauntings, suggesting “parallel realities in which the everyday can be doubled” and representing these within a haunted aesthetic realm (Curtis, 2008: 122). Adaptive palimpsests might be seen to participate in this, particularly in the Decadent aesthetics of *À rebours*, as well as *excitoir* or inventory narratives for *ars memoria* activation, or subjective texts which collage memories with interiors in palimpsest spaces, doubling realities for the participant.

Des Esseintes’ problems actually arise through the over-similitude between microcosm and macrocosm, and the reductive nature of the artificial world he has created for himself. More differentiation between the memory palace and the architext might have brought a

more stable division that would allow one to remain artificially ideal, combining the interior with the memories in the memory palace, while one remained instantiated, lessened somewhat but retaining a grip on reality and rejecting the doublings of mimesis. Instead, he tries to make his loci corporeal, his materiality ephemeral, and ends up decaying the boundaries into porosity. He has done what Bruno declined to do; “externalised in art the statues which he moulds in memory” (Yates, 1966: 296), and so has corrupted his present with the doppelgangers of the past, and vice versa. It is again mimesis that brings the spectres of Nature and the uncurated past, the return of the repressed, to bear so malignantly on Des Esseintes.

Huysmans uses the adaptive art of memory to work through or depict the relationship to the past in the *fin de siècle*. In his narrative he shows a conflation of museum/house/self, which adapts Nature in pursuit of aesthetic time, using a museological inventory frame work derived from the already “anxiogenic” (Curtis, 2008: 46) nineteenth-century interior, weaving in haunting memories that drive the Decadent back towards the world even as he tries to flee it. In modernity the past is rebellious and refuses to be subjugated by loci, as attested to by Des Esseintes’ haunting, where the uncontrollable personal past invades the memory palace designed to hold the fragments connoting the lecture/doctrines. The style of the house brings out “the uncanny quality of [the] museum [which] configures the anxiety of encountering the stored energies of the past” (Curtis, 2008: 45), dramatized further within the narrative for the curator of the uncanny museum is also its audience, and his fears are doubled in potency.

Yates speculates on where further scholarship on the art of memory might lead, particularly thinking about its influence on literature, on instantiations, and adaptations from the medium of the memory palace to a more manifest form - a secondary process of adaptation-as-representation after the adaptation to memory. This is similar to Des Esseintes’ re-projection of his memories onto the house in the form of hallucinations. Yates pursues her thoughts around where the art of memory might go when adapted from that medium,

imagining how the rooms of memory palaces “could become populated with characters, could become the backcloth for a drama” (1966: 301), and how they might already have done; a seam of *ars memoria* threading as an overlooked genre through literature. *À rebours* might indeed prove itself to be one of those examples, where Huysmans has created a notional memory palace for his character and adapted it *ekphrastically* from the medium of fictionalised memory to that of the novel.

If, like the museum, we can think of memory as a medium whose texts might be analysed in terms of adaptation, then the representation of one of these memory palaces in a medium such as novel or film is an adaptation, whether the initial palace is a personal construction or the imagined construction of a character. The slippages between these reflect those experienced by Des Esseintes in his memory palace - between the house that exists in his mind, imagined and adapted to the actual arrangement, which then dialogically overlays the ‘source’ or script version - and those physically curated interiors. The loci as intertexts or micro-adaptations collaged into the adaptation to memory create a text which may exist as an ephemeral adaptation, pure subjectivity, or it may be represented, further adapted, as an interior, a novel, a film.

Yates sees the teachings of Giordano Bruno as emphasising that all artists are memory artists before the adaptation to another medium, that this is, in fact “the core of the creative act, the inner act which precedes the outer expression” (1966: 249). Indeed, this is where the present study sees the importance of these ideas of subjective adaptation - that adaptation need not be marginalised and over-defined into specified modes of transference. Instead, it may be used as one way to analyse the shifting creative process of combinations, of alterations, which form the concept of the work in the memory. It may then also be a possible way to approach representation, the searching for instantiation that is the *ekphrastic* description of an internal or external vision, a curation assembled from fragments of intertextual or personal memories, and imagination. Both adaptation and the art of memory

have been treated as marginal subjects, but Yates shows, and perhaps adaptation is now beginning to demonstrate, that both of these, particularly if we link them as one process, turn out to be, “in a sense, everyone’s business” (Yates, 1966: 374).

### Chapter Summary

This chapter has built upon the ideas of curation, aesthetic time, aura, and mysticism from the previous chapter. Its focus has turned more fully to the narrative world of *À rebours*, and the experience of Des Esseintes, as an allegorisation and dramatisation of the creation of a Decadent work, mirroring that of the containing novel. Des Esseintes’ architext, as a curatorial adaptation of Nature, has been explored for its ability to deliver the subject from Nature (with its associations of the present, the masses, the body) by becoming a habitable text ensconcing the subject in aesthetic time.

The house depicted in the narrative, considered as Des Esseintes’ project of Decadent adaptation, has been broken down as a work of adaptation at varying levels. One of the most important layers of this text, one which collects smaller intertextual collages and intertexts, is the *mise-en-scène* of the house. This was analysed as a key Decadent collection text and a quintessentially Decadent creation, the product of the processes of adaptation analysed in the previous three chapters.

Delving into the narrative world, the chapter explored the processes that have formed the *mise-en-scène* text, as well as its structure. This has a particular focus on the role of memory in creating the artificial paradise of aesthetic time, where in the realist reading, the character collages fragmentary memory intertexts as part of the mosaic palimpsest of the adaptation of Nature he lives within. The creation of the *mise-en-scène* is posited as not only the Decadent adaptation of the fragmented sources of the external world, but simultaneously of a personal past in a practice that corresponds with the Classical idea of the *ars memoria*.

Des Esseintes is posited as utilising an *ars memoria* structure of creation as part of the process of adaptation which curates the *mise-en-scène*, which is the intertextual surface of the architext for the character. In the creation of this, Des Esseintes makes object-texts into further palimpsests by including layers of memory, making these textual fragments into *tremplins*.

The reception of these texts is auratic for the reading character, who is projected into an arena of memory and imagination beyond the body; an aesthetic, mystical time. The architext is therefore also a memory palace, a space that is physical, but which is doubled in his memory in order for the *tremplins* to function. In activating them - reading his auratic adaptation - Des Esseintes is launched into the aesthetic time of memory and imagination. The doubled adaptation of Nature is therefore a machine producing aesthetic time, allowing Des Esseintes, who has extended his subjecthood into the fragments of the house collection, to leave his body. His body is therefore a mere *tremplin* for his mental experiences, an exhibit in the museum, an artificed Natural source.

However, a strong Gothic element has been argued to emerge through the way that Des Esseintes has embedded his subjecthood in the objecthood of the house. The doubling of the house in physical and memorial space brings the uncanny, as memories have the potential – if authorial control is lost – to walk through boundaries which have been made indeterminate, from their curation in the memory palace to haunt the architext. Des Esseintes begins to lose control of his adaptation of Nature and its reception sensorium, with its myriad curated fragments. As the palimpsest house becomes uncanny, and simulation threatens to become simulacrum, which is driven by the episode of the flowers, we see Des Esseintes suffocating, and being returned to the present of embodiment. The adaptation begins to fail for the subject who lives within, turning on him, and in Des Esseintes' narrative we can see (via contributions from Freudian repression and the uncanny, plus Baudrillardian simulacra) the collapse of the ontology of Decadent aesthetics in Huysmans' experiment with it.

## 6. Artifice and Decay in the Adaptations of *À rebours*

### Chapter Introduction:

This chapter returns the focus to Huysmans in order to explore potential reasons for the inclusion of the *mise-en-abyme* of Decadent creation in the manner described in the previous chapter. The collapse of the Decadent retreat into the Gothic and uncanny, which suffocates Des Esseintes, is explored in terms of its reflection in the formal structures of the novel, where the curatorial adaptation of Nature into style, and the density of the intertextual layer, are shown to do for the novel and reader what the *mise-en-scène* does for the architext and character. By exploring analogies between bodies and texts in the novel, as well as constituting the novel, the idea of a structural decay that returns subjects to Natural embodiment<sup>490</sup> is posited as defining the adaptation that is this thread of *À rebours*' intertextuality. This is despite the potential for adaptation to signify a generative decay and a textual entropy which offers textual bodies a form of transcendence, similar to what Bryant calls the 'energy' of the text (2002: 2) which determines the fluidity of its versions. This is posited as the reason for adaptation's presence in *À rebours*, but adaptation is also shown to return the subject to that from which they have attempted to escape.

This chapter further explores the ideas of decay, ornamentation, and the way that versions of adaptation may contribute to revealing the failure of Decadent aesthetics in an ontological sense. It utilises figurative readings to create dialogues between adaptation and Decadent (and more abstracted) themes of decay, entropy, and embodiment, in order to show that in *À rebours*, what has been argued for as adaptation embodies these themes and

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<sup>490</sup> The link between nature and the body is evoked early in the Prologue as starting point through the image of the "last scions of feudal families": "the fleur-de-lis, which you find if you cut the stalk of a fern, was apparently also the only thing that remained impressed on the softening pulp inside these ancient skulls" (Huysmans, 1956: 6-7). Their bodily decay is aligned with the plant world in an initial embedding of this thematic association.



contributes to their unfolding significance. As an extension of this, ideas such as decay and entropy are shown to be productive for considering adaptation in its Decadent form, but also in a more essential sense. The textual afterlives of adaptations are explored in this chapter, and these are then connected back to *À rebours* within the framework of Huysmans' *oeuvre* and intentionality, in order to consider how adaptation in relation to Decadent themes might seem to offer the structures of meaning Huysmans may be seeking. This is in addition to the way in which Decadent aesthetics is manipulated to reveal its metaphysical emptiness in *À rebours*.

### Bodies and Texts: Materiality and Surfaces

Turning away from Des Esseintes' mind, we now focus on the relationship between bodies and texts in the novel, considering the tragedy of Des Esseintes' adaptation of Nature in terms of Huysmans' asymptotic 'working-through.' Des Esseintes' body is a constant presence returning to haunt the mind throughout *À rebours*. The *Prologue* sets up his sickness at the outset, with the pains in his neck and his trembling hands (Huysmans, 1956: 9), and the character frequently uses his intertexts to soothe this body as well as to escape it, such as his course of "emollient reading" of Dickens after the turning point of the flowers.

In *À rebours*, bodies and texts might be read as parallel:<sup>491</sup> they reflectively allegorise each other.<sup>492</sup> Bodily metaphors are frequently used for texts, such as the extended metaphor

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<sup>491</sup> Bennett says that Huysmans translated the play between décor and *des corps* (2010).

<sup>492</sup> Bourget's formulation of Decadent style employs a bodily metaphor to explore the dynamics at work in the texts. Navarette also identifies the body-as-text/text-as-body analogy as a central tendency in the 'late' Gothic - Decadent Gothic - where it is a means to negotiate anxieties, as well as an example of scientific paradigms being "troped in the literary artefacts of the time" (2015: 188). Not only is the body/text relation important here; the idea of the refraction of the scientific in the textual is particularly relevant to later discussions of entropy in *À rebours*. Ziegler has similarly suggested the physical/textual link (1989: 70) in his concentration on the importance of gastronomy and cycles of consumption in Huysmans' work, while Elliott has discussed adaptations in terms of bodily analogies, especially in terms of form/content splits and inherencies (2003: 135-9). In this chapter such cyclicity is important for exploring the possible motivations behind not only the

through the Latin library, where language as found in these texts is a decaying corpse.<sup>493</sup>

Adaptation is suggested to be a significant force for shaping the ways in which texts as bodies, and bodies as texts (as well as bodies in the texts) work through key ideas regarding cycles of artworks and organisms within *À rebours*. Within the framework of Decadent aesthetics, the body is a text in its existence as a direct source text from Nature, which might be artficed further into art - indeed, one which must be artficed into art to satisfy the Decadent subject and their aesthetic philosophy. For Des Esseintes, the body is a poor first draft.

Nature as source text(s) is further destabilised in Des Esseintes' house by the textualisation of the body, both in the way that the character appears to be attempting to become an aesthetic object himself (Maleuvre, 1999: 143) through artificialising processes,<sup>494</sup> and the way that Des Esseintes transposes senses to each other based on synaesthetic Baudelairean *correspondences*. This suggests their constructed nature; that if they can be transposed, then there is no 'original' primacy to their configuration, a mobility which makes of them intertexts liable to authorial intervention and rearrangement. Books are adapted to the visuality and tactility of bibliophilic bindings, and the olfactory is transposed to the gustatory in the mouth organ's 'symphonies' (1956: 45). These intermedial adaptations of the sensory source texts further adapt Nature by introducing authorial elaboration to the body itself.

Again, this under-layer of adapting Nature into the Decadent 'text' of the house at Fontenay is broken up, both by the self-contained nature of the set-pieces which create spectacle-texts (Sitzia (2015: 62) describes them as spectacle-producing machines) of

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adaptations in the text, but also those ideas underpinning the text/body conflations of *À rebours* which feed into the intertextual layer.

<sup>493</sup> e.g. "Des Esseintes lost nothing of his interest in the Latin language now that it was rotten through and through and hung like a decaying carcase, losing its limbs, oozing pus, barely keeping, in the general corruption of its body, a few sound parts, which the Christians removed in order to preserve them in the pickling brine of their new idiom" (Huysmans, 1956: 35).

<sup>494</sup> Such as the peptone enemas that were used to "trick the stomach" and escape his "alarming weakness," "halting the wasting process and keeping what little strength remained in him" (Huysmans, 1956: 193).

artificiality, and also the works which introduce the ‘chains’ of adaptation which destabilise the primacy of Nature as foundational source. These works present versions of the adaptations of Nature undertaken by the character, but further artficed by already being representations. Additionally, in the example of the Moreau ekphrases, Salome’s body is artficed within the painting, the organic ornamented by the “jewelled cuirass” (Huysmans, 1956: 51), adapting her natural referent into an artwork that pre-empts the experimentations of Des Esseintes, which echo hollowly in comparison, under the tyranny of the organic.

A text is experienced as embodied content in Decadence; if biology is just another medium, and ‘consciousness’ or ‘soul’ a type of aesthetic content, then texts are prey to an analogous version of the material vicissitudes which subjects experience (i.e. limitation, mutability, decay). The bodies of texts and subjects are formal encodings; but the bifurcation between these and content is not straightforward.<sup>495</sup> Despite the love of formal ornament and experiment, some theorists<sup>496</sup> have argued that embodiment might be read as an aesthetic tragedy in Decadent aesthetics, where medial (including biological) forms entrap more spiritual ‘essences’ of content in a mire of materiality,<sup>497</sup> within strict boundaries and the transient vulgarity of matter.<sup>498</sup> However, it is form which is the subject of Decadent aesthetics: whether biological, medial, or both. Form and its strictures, its materiality, are at the centre of *À rebours* as a novel about style. Additionally, as shown previously in instances such as the celebration of Apuleius, boundaries carry creative potential in the Decadent

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<sup>495</sup> See Chapter One for discussions of this idea in relation to adaptation.

<sup>496</sup> The Decadent “preoccupation” with the materiality of the literary medium (Murray & Hall, 2013: 12), also noted by Picker (2003), Reed (1985), Ziegler (2009), and others.

<sup>497</sup> Intertexts evoke the lusts and sufferings of bodies in forms approximating *memento mori*, but also a version of these embodied tortures which is aestheticised and held at a distance, reminding Des Esseintes of his accomplishment with regards to Nature and his hope for the body which is its link to him as a subject. The micro-collection of the plates of Jan Luyken present an example, depicting “bodies roasted over braziers, heads scalped with swords, trepanned with nails, lacerated with saws, bowels taken out of the belly and wound on to bobbins, finger-nails slowly removed with pincers, eyes put out, eyelids pinned back, limbs dislocated and carefully broken, bones laid bare and scraped for hours with knives” (Huysmans, 1956: 58).

<sup>498</sup> A view derived from both the Christian and Platonic traditions, as well as a return to the fidelity response, i.e. castigating the incarnational (Elliott, 2003: 166). Meisel has also discussed the incarnational adaptation (1983).

aesthetics of Huysmans' novel, and if textualisation makes the body a media instantiation, adaptation offers a tantalising glimpse at a kind of metempsychosis, an aesthetic afterlife as transposed subject.

The materiality of embodiment makes texts and media important analogues for Decadent characters such as Des Esseintes, and perhaps also for this author who puts so much of himself into his works.<sup>499</sup> In *À rebours* the aesthetic sphere negotiates the interplay between spirit and matter, and adaptation becomes an important way to experiment with materiality. Its transpositions undermine the singularity of forms, moving further into the ornament of artifice, away from the base imprisonments of the organic. However, the process of adaptation must always be instantiated as activated product (Hutcheon, 2006: 7).<sup>500</sup> In this sense, adaptation's suggestions of fluidity are only temporary deferrals of embodiment - like so many other Decadent pleasures, adaptation is a *pharmakon*, habit-forming in its temporary curativeness.

The possibilities of adaptation as a textual force analogous to the bodily ones of imagination and memory might be suggested, being a similar process of temporary ghostings into other 'media.' Following this, adaptation as a version of memory and imagination within the textual body appears as a testing of boundaries and a connection allowing interaction with past works and imagined works, an engagement beyond singular instantiation. It allows a text to recall its previous lives or transcend its current one, holding the potential for resurrection. Adaptation, as a way that a text has imagination and memory, allows a text to escape from its present, being a way for a text to change, to extricate a version of itself (potentially) from its

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<sup>499</sup> Baldick sees his *oeuvre* as forming "the most comprehensive of autobiographies" (1955: 480).

<sup>500</sup> Even in Bryant's (2002) important disassembling of the single adaptive text into a series of versions, each version forming the work requires a material manifestation.

time, place, form, and instead to engage with that vague, mystic space of textual *correspondences*.<sup>501</sup>

Adaptation finds a time beyond the singular text in auratic distance. This is analogous to Des Esseintes' use of memory and imagination within the text of the house, where they allow him to burst out of the prison of his own century and roam about at liberty in another period, an aesthetic adaptation of self to art, saving the subject from their failed biological adaptation, where he is "unable to attune himself" to his environment (Huysmans, 1956: 166). Adaptation is a route (for the novel as a remembering body, and for its character), to leaving the mire of the individual body. Like memory and imagination, the adaptations within and potentially of the textual body offer a way to forget the embodied subject via the *tremplins* of texts and objects. This is an *ars memoria* of the physical, that is tested for its ability to deliver the subject from embodiment and adapt the consciousness to another media form - to live in the memory palace. As we have seen, though, this fails for Des Esseintes.

The idea of testing, of experimenting with form and embodiment, is an important aspect of Des Esseintes' use of adaptation and blending of self with text in the memory palace of the *mise-en-scène*. Antosh sees Huysmans' middle novels as all depicting characters who "experiment with various modes of liberation from their own past into the more impersonal realm of art" (1986: 63), and it is perhaps also part of Huysmans' use of the process. If the novel is considered in terms of Ziegler's theory of the Decadent asymptote, the work is a 'writing away' of Decadent tendencies and Naturalist literary stagnation, and additionally an explored route in the search for a deliverance that the author eventually found in religion.

Des Esseintes constantly tests embodiment and the materiality of both the objects/texts in his collection, and his own body as another text in an unstable media form.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>501</sup> Similar to where Eco sees a myriad clichés moving the spectator "because we sense dimly that the clichés are talking amongst themselves" (1986: 209). See also the final sub-section of Chapter Four.

Huysmans' testing might also be seen in the grander scheme of the novel as a laboratory for experimentations with embodiment, as proving ground for transmutations of self through the catalysing avatars and allegories of the text. Des Esseintes tests textual boundaries by adaptively extending texts into bindings and tableaux. Huysmans tests the materiality of the media body in which his novel is manifested, transposing paintings to its content via *ekphrasis*, where they bring intermediality to the novel, perforating its media boundaries as they hang, objectified for the describing subject, on the walls. Music, scent, taste, tactility, and more abstract sensory engagements such as pain, hunger, and cravings are drawn into the novel to test its ability to signify them, testing its body for adaptability, striving for the *gesamtkunstwerk*, the *ekphrasis* of Des Esseintes' *gesamtkunsthaus*, and a making-porous of the bodily boundaries of the novel's medium specificity.

Des Esseintes similarly attempts the intermedial transpositions undertaken in the novel's body in his own biological version, via synaesthesia. Artworks suggest the possibilities for bodies in *À rebours*; they are the ideal condition, 'living' in aesthetic time. Their boundaries are more responsive to the artifices of authorial creativity, their forms more able to incorporate, and their content remains within the adaptations undertaken - whereas Des Esseintes must always return from his memories and reveries, for otherwise uncanniness enters in the unmooring of self. The flowers of Chapter Eight show that the authored adaptation of biological form as a source text, based on the model of textuality, might create beauties of artifice, transcending the biological by introducing authorship into its versions. However, they prefigure the failure of the mirroring of aesthetics in biology with their uncanny turn, ending by returning Des Esseintes to his own putrefying body, his form which rejects the authorial gilding.

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<sup>502</sup> Just as other bodies are adapted through his aestheticising tableaux, where in the memories of his mistresses, the setting he created meant that "their flesh borrowed soft warm tints from the light which hidden lamps filtered through the awning" (Huysmans, 1956: 11).

Scanning through examples of affective embodiment from after this section, it is clear that the experience of the plants and nightmare have changed the dynamic of the house, for afterwards, intertexts invert, producing “the opposite effect from what he had expected,” delivering him straight back to the body “by virtue of the law of contrasts,” recalling “full-blooded, earthy passion” (1956: 95). After the gradual encroachment of uncurated memories within the architext, which become physically affecting after the flowers and the dream, embodied memories increase in frequency and potency, bouncing Des Esseintes back from aesthetic time, through auratic reception *à rebours*, out of whichever *tremplin* he is engaging with, and back into his body.

The “carnal side of his nature,” disturbed by pious works and irritated by “an attack of nerves brought on by [Dickens’] cant” leads to “his stimulated senses carrying him back down the years” to wallow in the memories of old dissipations after the hothouse opens the floodgates. His *tremplin* bonbons no longer vaguely evoked distant memories but instead “tore the veils down and thrust before his eyes the bodily reality in all its crudity and urgency.” Without the veils and jewels, Salome lacks all artifices and becomes threatening to Des Esseintes in her sexuality, recalling the dream. His memories are subsuming the present again, reasserting Nature through the body, as he falls into recollections of the flesh, where the “mutual attachment” with the young man is recalled as a key part which “dominated all the rest” in this collection (1956: 96).

Next, hallucinations come to haunt, walking out of the memory as “sensual illusion” where aesthetic time returns to rupture the Nature/artifice dichotomies and reveal the *pharmakon* of his sensorium (1956: 104).<sup>503</sup> After the close call of the trip to England, Des

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<sup>503</sup> This is seen in the creative endeavour of the perfume scene which attempts to dispel the frangipane. Inspired by memories of adapting Baudelaire to scent, Des Esseintes conjures up a countryside perfume-scape, one firstly filled with women, and then by factories – symbols associated with his adapted nexus of Nature, biology, modernity. This morphs into “an insanely sublimated vegetation, emitting powerful exhalations” recalling Zola’s *Abbé Mouret*. However, he cannot control this (evoking the plants, prefiguring Gilles de Rais in the forest of *Là-bas*), and he next feels a stab of pain “as if a drill were boring into his temples” and is forced to throw the window open as the reverie of Nature returns him to bodily suffering. Next a memory subsumes, suddenly enveloping

Esseintes tries to pile up books to keep the world out in the chapter on modern authors.

However, the next chapter (Thirteen) is again defined by embodiment, which is encroaching with great intensity. Heat is assaulting Des Esseintes and keeping him trammelled within his body: “never had he felt so weak, so ill at ease.” He begins to hallucinate, losing his “sense of distance” (1956: 151-2), moving into the garden and seeking “refuge” in source Nature, but here it takes him an hour of staring at vegetables to realise what they are through the “greenish mist” he is hallucinating (1956: 153). The plants return him to the body again through a returning set of analogies between them and genitalia, and next emerges a sequence of bodily abjection in its description by Huysmans.

In a scene which micro-adapts Baudelaire’s poem ‘Cake,’ Des Esseintes watches children fighting over a “nauseating snack” which evokes a “depraved longing” in the character, while Huysmans describes the child who holds it: “two green bubbles hung from his nose and his lips were coated with the disgusting white mess he was eating” (1956: 154). For Des Esseintes, Nature as source text, now uncontrolled and acting violently upon his sensorium, returns him to abject bodies which lead towards his own unravelling form, where spasms of pain “jolted his thoughts back to Fontenay from the distant regions they had been roaming” (1956: 162), puncturing aesthetic time.

Moving back and forth between attempted reassertion of the adaptation through auratic reception via micro-collections such as the modern library, Des Esseintes cannot fully recover himself. He can “no longer visit with impunity his red entrance-hall” (Huysmans, 1956: 177) where the tortures of Luyken had mocked embodied Nature in its artificial frame, and which now cannot be engaged with for fear of uncanny aura delivering him to the

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him “in astonishing detail,” a “hallucination” which “carries him away far from Fontenay.” In the memory now, he considers the fine weather and attributes it to industry, lost in this memory for some time, before “faintness” returns him to his body, where he realises the toll that his experiments are having upon him. Throwing open the window again, a series of scent fragments assail him, and he realises with “horror” and fear of demonic possession that these are the fragments that make up artificial frangipane. They swiftly coalesce, spreading up the valley to the fort, Natural fragments becoming a haunting whole in a mirroring of their adaptation which assails his fragile sensorium, “throwing him into such a state of prostration that he fell fainting, almost dying, across the window-sill” (Huysmans, 1956: 110-115).



sufferings of corporeal time. The modern library distracts, then the stomach trouble returns, forcing Des Esseintes to abandon his idealised eating of *osmazomes à rebours*.<sup>504</sup>

His illness returns with new intensity, with “aural illusions” and “derangement,” as well as the enveloping memories of “the religious atmosphere of his adolescence,” where sight and smell take up the hallucinations, bringing incense and light through stained glass (1956: 186). “Tormented by anxiety,” he has become a “hairy death’s-head,” and the body is now dominant after being suppressed in the first third of the novel, sporadically emerging via memory in the middle, and gradually encroaching more on the experience of the character and the reader in the last third (1956: 191). This brief exploration of stages of increasing illness and corporeality after the hothouse chapter of *À rebours* illustrates the themes of bodily collapse, the desire for escape from embodiment, and the increasing corruption of Des Esseintes’ body which is the product of the Gothic hauntings that rupture the artificial paradise of the retreat.

With adaptation as a method, the hope for Des Esseintes is that the bodies of artworks and organisms might blur into each other, might confound the tyranny of Naturalism’s venerated reality principle in simulation, and adapt the body for the subject. However, as traced, the simulation becomes simulacrum, re-affirming Nature by reconstituting or replacing it,<sup>505</sup> and threatens the subject. Artworks and bodies alike are testing grounds, studio laboratories; but, as with all of Des Esseintes’ experiments which seek to map aesthetic philosophy onto corporeal existence, they fall short and induce a collapse. The materiality of the biological medium has a power not easily overthrown by versions of adaptation modelled on textual dynamics. Memory, imagination, textual immersion always end by returning the subject to the body. The latter has its own Darwinian version of adaptation, coldly logical and

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<sup>504</sup> Which he describes as “the ultimate deviation from the norm.” This also emphasises the link between body and Nature, as Des Esseintes exclaims “what a slap in the face for old Mother Nature, whose monotonous demands would be permanently silenced!” (Huysmans, 1956: 193).

<sup>505</sup> See Spackman (1999) for a discussion of how the doxa is reaffirmed in *À rebours*.

unrelenting, that confounds the desire to become an artwork, to live outside the body in projections.

Genes perpetuate the text without the author, the form without content, recalling syphilis, where “ever since the beginning of the world, from generation to generation, all living creatures had handed down the inexhaustible heritage, the everlasting disease” (Huysmans, 1956: 87). They are the uncanny version of adaptation which Des Esseintes tries to appropriate in textuality in the vain hope of a profane transcendence: but the body/mind as text is tied by a powerful formalism to an intensely materialist and - for the ‘self’ - ultimately suffocating carapace. As the encroaching memories that begin with the tortoise become subsuming via the flowers, making the house uncanny and returning Des Esseintes to his body through illness, so too does faith return with Nature<sup>506</sup> if a prefiguring of the end of the novel, where as Des Esseintes is forced back into the world by his body, he cries out to God for his next form of salvation.

Textualising bodies, testing them for their responsiveness to curatorial adaptation, is an extension of the adaptation of Nature, where the organic is aestheticised, a challenge to its power through the artificial controls of authorship.<sup>507</sup> Experimenting with the bodies of texts, and with the limits and forms of textualised bodies, brings adaptation into the light as a significant experimental process, whose findings are transposed by analogy into the possibilities of similar discoveries in the matter of textualised bodies.

Bodies within the texts micro-adapted to *À rebours* are obsessively ornamented in their stylising transposition. The biological bodies (e.g. Salome) within *À rebours*’ foregrounded intertexts highlight the *mise-en-abyme* that sees them reflected in the aesthetic forms they are encoded within,<sup>508</sup> and the form of the aesthetic embedding which these are

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<sup>506</sup> The “fearful intimations of faith had been troubling Des Esseintes more particularly since his health had begun to deteriorate” (Huysmans, 1956: 79).

<sup>507</sup> The body reflects Nature’s broader imprisonment of the subject.

<sup>508</sup> e.g. *ekphrastic* painting as remediated textual body.

encoded within - the novel as body. The narrative's own featured biological bodies<sup>509</sup> of, in particular, Des Esseintes and the tortoise, play the same role of linking the experimentation between the two sides of embodiment; the textual and the biological.<sup>510</sup>

Des Esseintes often experiments with his own body via the bodies of artworks featuring bodies, interpreting the painting of Salome by dwelling on her gilded adornments rather than her natural body, and transposing this reading to the experiment with the tortoise, which prefigures the artificialisations of his own body in the house-carapace. These might be read as metaphorically reflecting Huysmans, in another layer of *mise-en-abyme*, as the author experiments conceptually with his own body via that of the novel, and those within the novel in their different stages of fictional artifice.<sup>511</sup> The materiality of the medium is certainly a central obsession, and therefore anything like adaptation that allows the coherence of that materiality to be tested, via moving aspects of it to different forms of incarnation, is an important component for exploring these ideas.

Much of this thesis has been concerned with the way in which the textual/medial body of *À rebours* actually incorporates other textual bodies through adaptations, transposing them to a different materiality. In this, it is possible to extrapolate Huysmans the adapter experimenting with fragmentation and collage, deciding which parts of the adapted forms endure, survive, and how their embodiment within *À rebours* changes both the novel and the fragmented adapted texts. It is a technique of incorporation which both fragments and recreates.<sup>512</sup> These curated adaptations have been shown to complicate the boundaries of text

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<sup>509</sup> Aesthetic for the reader as Salome is for Des Esseintes.

<sup>510</sup> The jewels on the tortoise's body, which have been read as analogies for the intertexts and micro-adaptations of the novel's surface, are often described in the corporeal metaphors which are predominant in Huysmans' work, prefiguring the connection between intertextual jewels and decay later in this chapter. For example, the "celadon blue" of the turquoise "looks thick, opaque and sulphurous, as if jaundiced with bile" (Huysmans, 1956: 43).

<sup>511</sup> A version of the chains or pinnacles discussed in Chapters Two and Three.

<sup>512</sup> A simultaneity found in postmodernist approaches, as noted by Sanders (2005: 74).

and medium, rendering the novel hybrid.<sup>513</sup> Also observed are the ways in which the novel enacts a kind of controlled partial resurrection of these foreign bodies. It is interesting to note that it is at this time that the *fin de siècle* was discovering the existence of parasites through the 1880 work of Laveran, with its revelation that bodies are full of other bodies, which might be malign. *À rebours* too is a textual body teeming with other forms, other bodies: textual and biological, benign, malign, and frequently both.

In *À rebours*, the other bodies collected within the text/body are rarely hidden – the text is full of acknowledged intertexts; some adapted (e.g. ‘Anywhere Out of the World,’ some intertextual fragments (e.g. Flaubert’s sphinx dialogue),<sup>514</sup> or micro-adaptations (e.g. Mallarmé),<sup>515</sup> collected to be adapted with fragments of textualised Nature as a heterocosmic source. Hence curation, with its implications of display, being a relevant figure for Huysmans as well as Des Esseintes. As such, the intertexts and adaptive sources adorn the skin of the text rather than being subsumed into it. This is an encrusting of surface, with the fragmentary and multiple version of adaptation being, as previously mentioned, part of the way in which Decadent literary style foregrounds the formal texture of the medium.<sup>516</sup> Words often appear as sonorities of half-meaning rather than as coherent signifiers (Denisoff, 2007: 37); rare jewels extruding from the buckler of the page, which is gilded by a syntax that does not allow for pause between adornments. They are an ornamental carapace, Schor’s “pathology of detail” threatening metastasis (2013: 47), which Bernheimer describes as a fetishised textual surface “studded with elements alien to biological life” (1989: 264), artificing a body of ‘natural’ or organic narrative.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>513</sup> In a search of that original intermedial inspiration of Huysmans’ - to paint with words (Gamboni, 2011: 129).

<sup>514</sup> See Chapter Three of this thesis.

<sup>515</sup> Whose poem *L’après-midi d’un faune* (1876) is micro-adapted as fragments within an analogically structured tableaux.

<sup>516</sup> And which for the character heightens artifice while keeping Nature in its deferred, adapted place.

<sup>517</sup> Exacerbated by Naturalist associations and aspects of realist style.

The Decadent style of the text's adaptations and other forms of intertextuality is similarly a preoccupation with surface - the limits and skin of the body - a reflection of the ornamental mereology of the writing style. *À rebours'* crystalline structures of *mise-en-abyme* require this mirroring of the microscopic in the macroscopic, reflexively engaged: as individual words dominate the sentence, and sentences overrun the page, so individual texts, curatorially adapted or intertextually cited, retain a fragmentary independence. They undermine the integrity of the novel as a unified whole, keeping the mereological relationship continuous across the various levels of structure in the text. Decadent adaptation creates this in the materiality of the novel as an adorned body, foregrounding the constructions of its texture for artificial pleasure.<sup>518</sup> The texts sit on the surface because they are acknowledged through citation as an objectified fragment in the narrative; their borders cannot be missed. In the interrelations of *mise-en-abyme* between author and character the intertexts are instantiated; embodied, framed, bound. The acknowledgement focuses on the character describing the tactility of handling them in their 'physical' form.

The surface of the embodied text is therefore always in view, as intertextuality mirrors the functions of the language. The novel as a novel is constantly acknowledged through the ornamenting of its form with other versions of textuality, squaring the artifice involved at every opportunity. The novel, with its jewelled ciborium, is therefore like Salome, dazzling the reader:

The strings of diamonds glitter against her moist flesh; her bracelets, her belts, her rings all spit out fiery sparks; and across her triumphal robe, sewn with pearls,

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<sup>518</sup> As noted by Spackman (1999: 36).

patterned with silver, spangled with gold, the jewelled cuirass, of which every chain is a precious stone, seems to be ablaze (Huysmans, 1956: 51).<sup>519</sup>

This *ekphrasis* can be read as a synecdoche for the ornamental mosaic of the textual body, where intertextual fragments, adapted as a source text representing Nature, are less akin to thin palimpsestic films,<sup>520</sup> less a succession of veils, and - like Salome's costume of artificial fragments in the *ekphrasis* - more a lapidary suit of armour which flaunts its collection. Echoing both Salome and the tortoise, the intertextual surface of *À rebours* is an extension of what Bernheimer calls the "densely encrusted verbal surface" (Bernheimer, 1999: 56), a polymedial mass of intertextual jewels artificing the organic body of the narrative.

As noted previously,<sup>521</sup> this body might be seen to be a decaying one, putrefying in its stasis under the crush of the ornament, beneath the aesthetic collection - which has killed it like the tortoise beneath its artficed shell. Mirroring these two examples in the text, which are both partially artficed bodies adapted to textuality in their different diegeses, and synecdoches for the body of the text as a whole, the surface is a constantly foregrounded dimension. The ornament attempts to artifice away the organic decay below, adapting the transience of flesh (a source text from Nature) into something transcendent and intoxicating, an art beyond life. Des Esseintes follows their example, trying to cover his organicity with artificial authorial intervention, becoming the collection, merging with the carapace, highlighting sensorial surface and rupturing the boundaries of his source text with micro-adaptations. In all three of these bodies, we see a version of the way that Huysmans armours the novel with the ornaments of other texts.

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<sup>519</sup> This is also the adaptation of a body rather than its replacement, in the way that all of this jewelling requires the foundation of the "mat flesh" over which to swarm, the "tea-rose skin," against which they crawl "like gorgeous insects with dazzling shards" (Huysmans, 1956: 51). The source and the new materials which adorn it are constantly in dialogue.

<sup>520</sup> As palimpsestuous layers are for Geraghty in adaptations (2008) and De Quincey in memory (1845).

<sup>521</sup> Recalling the *Katakombenheiligen*.

Through these approaches, the novel's materiality is pored over by author and reader alike. The medium specificity of the work is constantly evoked and troubled by transposing other media to its museum space. The media surface of the text is always in view, because intermediality, embedded in textuality, is always erupting from it in different forms. However, the text's artficed body is ornamented by forms which are on the same side of the biological/textual divide as the novel itself: even though it is ornamented by other media forms, they are transposed to its own materiality, and they are all texts. Very few Natural bodies<sup>522</sup> are employed directly within the narrative, and can only engage with the ornamentation of the textual surface analogically. The text is therefore an artifice encrusted by artifices, as opposed to Salome and the tortoise, which are depictions of Nature encrusted by artifice. Indulging figurative readings in this vein highlights some interesting aspects that may further the discussions regarding bodies and texts, with Salome's story across the two Moreau *ekphrases* as something of a microcosmic staging of the whole.

While texts and bodies may act as analogies for each other, and work to destabilise boundaries by representing each other in a structure recalling Elliott's looking glass analogy, these explorations generally rely on the retention of the opposition of Nature and artifice within the text/body dichotomy.<sup>523</sup> A reading of the analogous version of the textual body containing other textual bodies creates a very different, yet potentially evocative, effect. In the biological category, the formulation which sees the body incorporating a multitude of other organic bodies would at first recall the previously mentioned idea of parasites or microbes. However, when these organic forms are present on the surface, rupturing the skin to problematise the integrity of the body - and when they are clearly visible - they suggest less a lapidary armouring,<sup>524</sup> and instead evoke the worms that infest a corpse.

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<sup>522</sup> Only notably Des Esseintes and the tortoise in the present.

<sup>523</sup> As explored by Gaillard (1978).

<sup>524</sup> Which would require crossing the dyad, for this is an artifice more allied to textuality than the organic.

This more grisly figure edges the interpretations towards the reading of the effects and possible intentions of the encrusted adaptive surface, and is further suggested by the fate of *À rebours*' artficed biological bodies. The tortoise and Des Esseintes clearly echo one another, and signify the inability of the body to maintain itself beneath the ornament of excessive artifice. The Salome reading might go further than the tortoise in additionally clarifying in allegory some of the possible dynamics in the relationship between authors, readers, characters, and the Decadent work of elaborate surfaces. Like the textual jewels of adaptation, which suggest worms once the dyad is reversed, and the novel's body is considered as a biological one, the surfaces in the Salome *ekphrasis* carry a further echo of the theme's eventual unfolding.

The two Moreau *ekphrases* rely on our knowledge of the abstracted story of Salome, for they are elliptic stills, two frames signifying the fluidity of a story from which they are extracted. If the fate of ornamented bodies is our subject for exploration, considering the functions of analogy and allegory between the novel as body, represented bodies, adaptation, and the Decadent ontology, then the second painting of the two, with its violence and illustration of consequence, is the most evocative. For Des Esseintes it creates "an even more disturbing impression" (Huysmans, 1956: 54). *The Apparition* shows the Baptist's head, stark and terrible, dominating the painting, hanging like a sun, brighter than Salome's ornaments and dazzling<sup>525</sup> her into writhings of ecstatic guilt.

If Salome's body is an allegory for *À rebours*, then the Baptist – in the previous painting 'offscreen,' but now a revelatory hallucination beating down upon the female body who has become pure image, all power lost as it was channelled into a single request - might be Des

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<sup>525</sup> Also dazzling the reader through the heady exoticism of the words used to describe the palace setting, the piled-up viscosity of the adjectives, the list form of the description, and the alliteration and assonance: "Herod's palace rose up like some Alhambra on slender columns iridescent with Moresque tiles, which appeared to be bedded in silver mortar and gold cement; arabesques started from lozenges of lapis lazuli to wind their way right across the cupolas, whose mother-of-pearl marquetry gleamed with rainbow lights and flashed with prismatic fires" (Huysmans, 1956: 54).



Esseintes, sacrificed at the behest of the text. Alternately, and perhaps more significantly, the decapitated John might be read as signifying Nature, the imprisoned external world. It returns as the source signifying an objective and eternal materiality which undermines its parodying in artifice, revealing the human decay beneath the ornament in its reducing glare, its belying of aesthetic time and textual modes of transcendence.<sup>526</sup> Salome's face is "encircled" by a "mosaic" and a "halo of light." In the allegorical reading of Salome as the novel, this might represent the structure of the heterocosmic adaptation from one collection to another, where her face, artficed by cosmetics, is the adapted Nature-heterocosm at the centre of its mosaic of acknowledged intertextual fragments, and the unacknowledged intertextuality diffusing out from these. The Baptist's "livid," "staring" face becomes the uncanny mirror of this adapted heterocosm, the source returning (Huysmans, 1956: 54).

The scene has its reader in Herod, who lustily consumes via the eyes, seduced by the interaction between the beguiling surfaces and the undulating body (or narrative) which connects their fragments. Herod does not see the head of the Baptist, but it is through the Tetrarch's power that the latter is killed. Herod experiences the vision, the horror of the consequences and their revelation only via Salome,<sup>527</sup> via her perception of the unseen death's head, and its effect upon her body, which has become contorted in hysteria:<sup>528</sup> "with a gesture of horror, Salome tries to thrust away the terrifying vision which holds her nailed to the spot, balanced on the tips of her toes, her eyes dilated, her right hand clawing convulsively at her throat" (Huysmans, 1956: 54).

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<sup>526</sup> This is what is reflected in the *mise-en-abyme* of Des Esseintes' narrative and project, as traced in the previous chapter.

<sup>527</sup> "Visible to Salome alone, it embraces in its sinister gaze neither Herodias musing over the ultimate satisfaction of her hatred, nor the Tetrarch, who, bending forward a little with his hands on his knees, is still panting with emotion" (Huysmans, 1956: 55).

<sup>528</sup> See Hanson for an extensive examination of the links between hysteria and mysticism in Huysmans' work, and its implication in his conversion (1994).

Huysmans is, of course, Herodias, lurking in the shadows, pulling the strings. In this sense, Salome, as the body of the text before Herod, allegorises the intoxication of the reader with an ornamented body of surfaces hinting at depths. “Like the old King,” Des Esseintes, the proxy spectator one layer up in the adaptive diegeses, “invariably felt overwhelmed, subjugated, stunned when he looked at this dancing-girl,” a reception of sensory intensity breeding auratic distance. Huysmans attempts to transmit the same effect to the reader through these proxies, and through the style of the description which vacillates between body and artifice in the inventory form which spins out the extended nature of the *ekphrasis*, making it more overwhelming for the reader.<sup>529</sup>

Her manipulated victimisation of the one in her power - which in this figurative formulation is Nature - and her subsequent vision of horror in the uncanny return signified by the apparition, which is perceived obliquely by the ‘audience,’ might be read as an allegory for the way in which the materiality of the adaptive surface in *À rebours* conveys an impression of a Decadent ontology through its aesthetics. This will be returned to in the next section.

The gilded bodies within the *ekphrases* of these works,<sup>530</sup> which allegorise the embodied novel and its surfaces, come to ends which signify the fate of the Decadent experimenter. This figure, whose “fundamental paradox” is seeking to transcend the materiality of their medium, to find a voice without a body (Picker, 2003: 112), searches for textual solutions to biological problems.<sup>531</sup> This includes Huysmans and his novel, for its surfaces can be seen to be suffocating for Des Esseintes, who is analogous to the tortoise, as well as being a communicator of a dread revelation for the reader, where Salome allegorises

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<sup>529</sup> e.g. the single sentence of: “a gorgerin grips her waist like a corselet, and like an outsize clasp a wondrous jewel sparkles and flashes in the cleft between her breasts; lower down, a girdle encircles her hips, hiding the upper part of her thighs, against which dangles a gigantic pendant glistening with rubies and emeralds; finally, where the body shows bare between gorgerin and girdle, the belly bulges out, dimpled by a navel which resembles a graven seal of onyx with its milky hues and its rosy fingernail tints” (Huysmans, 1956: 55).

<sup>530</sup> One by Moreau, one – the tortoise-text - by Des Esseintes.

<sup>531</sup> e.g. mapping *correspondences* from Baudelaire to the body, via the machine-text which is an adaptation.

the novel. The micro-adaptations in *À rebours* are frequently fragmentary synecdoches for the novel's own use of surfaces - which they also contribute to by encrusting its skin with acknowledged intertextuality.

### Entropic Collapse: Surface Artifice and Decay

It has been contended thus far that in *À rebours*, adaptation is a method of artificing the form of the text, and dwelling on the materiality of the body. Curatorial adaptation as an intertextual process brings other texts to encrust the surface of the novel, a mode of ornamentation that increases textual artifice. The use of this adaptive model as a mode of artifice might be seen to be particularly efficacious due to its ability to construct *mise-en-abyme* embeddings in fragments, where *mise-en-abyme* as an aesthetic effect challenges the reader through exposing artifice and inducing reflexivity (Snow, 2016: 68).<sup>532</sup> Not only do these artifices reflect back and forth between works on the surface of the text, but due to the acknowledged nature of these embeddings (the acknowledgement that means they are on the surface, not subsumed), a repetitious mereological tension is constructed. The parts are placed in tension with the whole, and the surface form with the content, due to the very awareness of materiality which is brought by the clear inclusion of other texts.

The artifice of the novel is consistently highlighted and placed alongside the artifices within the novel - those of Des Esseintes - by the inclusion of foregrounded forms of media and textuality, which consistently evoke the constructed and mutable nature of texts including Huysmans' novel itself. The adaptation(s), therefore, create an indeterminacy, a questioning of materiality, and a disruption of any sense of the surface as smooth for the reader. Just as, for Bernheimer, "Huysmans uses Modernist techniques of rupture and discontinuity to re-member the surface of the text as a fetish," (1989: 264), so adaptations

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<sup>532</sup> *Ekphrasis* is often thought of as both precursor and version of *mise-en-abyme* (Snow, 2016 :12).

render the novel's unity as a signifying body ruptured and discontinuous. The artificial status of the novel is at the forefront of the reader's experience.

In this sense, the adaptive parts might be seen to rebel against the whole.<sup>533</sup> This is due to their artifice going beyond the function of the stylisation of Nature, to become instead a weight of reflexivity which puts pressure on the ability of the collection of parts to stay together. This in turn interrupts reception, challenging the reader with another version of the "material density" which Bernheimer reads in the inclusion of textual aspects as objects (1989: 264). The reader is disrupted by the fragmentary intertextuality of the novel in terms of their ability to engage with a text which keeps referring to its own artifice, even as in its diegesis artifice is increasingly shown to be empty and even dangerous.

Like the tortoise, and like Des Esseintes' architext, the surface of the novel becomes increasingly heavy for the novel, and for the reader engaging with its 'living' aspect of immersive narrative. In the case of the adaptation which incorporates micro-adaptations and other intertextual citations, these parts carry extra weight because they refer outside of the text's body to other texts. They place the novel as another text among many, one similar to the multitude collected by Des Esseintes, and one similarly unable to offer any lasting escape, meaning, or transcendence. The narrative depicts the failure of texts to deliver the reader-character from Nature, and the intertextual surface consistently points out the novel's own parallel status as one of them. This weight of artifice, this sense of the novel creating an instability in its own structure,<sup>534</sup> is contributed to by the fragmentation and excess of the adaptation(s), which include a foregrounded intertextual surface. The sheer number of texts acknowledged in *À rebours*, the diversity of media forms, and the way that all remain as individual works in the mosaic which adapts Nature, mean that this surface layer is

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<sup>533</sup> In the aforementioned figure of worms perforating the decaying corpse.

<sup>534</sup> Recommended further study would take up these ideas within the specific framework of Derridean deconstruction, which they clearly echo. These could be usefully aligned with Cohen's framing of adaptation as itself a deconstruction (1979).

overburdened. It is rendered excessive yet particulate, just like the lapidary design on the tortoise's shell, or the underside of the architext which is the *mise-en-scène* of the house.

Echoing the tortoise, the novel might be seen to be killed by this in terms of its narrative,<sup>535</sup> where the surface becomes too heavy in its all-encompassing, foregrounded nature, where the description and discussion of works suffocates the reader. In the midst of its listings, the novel seems only to speak of other works, and not of anything in itself. The flow of narrative is arrested by the adapted works, helping to create that irresolution noted by Reed (1985: 135), where the text remains atomised, a collection of parts which frequently reminds the reader of its status as such. Immersion for the reader is impossible due to this excessive fragmentation and self-reflexivity. In addition to the impact on the body of narrative, the heavy surface of intertextual ornament making up the adaptive mosaic weighs increasingly heavily on the experience of meaning in the text.

The novel's ability to signify is disrupted by the panoply of texts and their weight of self-reflexivity. This gives a deeper sense of the connection between formal attributes and the text's ontology; an aspect the reader is frequently prompted to access through Des Esseintes' musings on religion, and his search for an aesthetic mysticism. Instead, the text breaks up these passages with the irruption of other texts, re-inscribing the novel-as-textual-artefact and undermining its ability to draw the reader into their own aesthetic time.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Halpern notes this in terms of narrative (1978), whilst Hanson describes Salome as being "killed into art" (1994: 156).

<sup>536</sup> This suggests a degree of proto-postmodernity in *À rebours* that is certainly not an alien concept; the discussions of simulacra have noted the connections made by many theorists between Decadent aesthetics and postmodern theory (Zurbrugg (1999); Poggioli (1960); Klette (2015)). Indeed, Betts goes beyond Weir's enduring idea of Decadence as a major step in the teleology of Modernism (1995), and makes reference to a perspective where postmodernism becomes "an acceleration of textual phenomena present in early Modernist, notably historically Decadent works" (Betts, 2011: 175). Mallarmé, a writer with many Decadent associations, has also been proffered in the work of McCaffery (2000: 187) as a proto-deconstructionist, and originator of textual destabilisations based in metatextual irony and media hybridity. In the adaptive surface of *À rebours* these postmodern associations are particularly relevant for emphasising the notion that "self-conscious and self-reflexive Decadent texts are not merely about de-systematised meaning - they embody it" (Betts, 2011: 175), and this aspect of their embodiment is important for considering the effects communicated by the aesthetics.

In addition to breaking up the experience materially, the adaptations keep signifying more surfaces within texts, artifices within texts: surfaces speaking of surfaces and aesthetics looping back around to aesthetics, as in Moreau's Salomes and their subject matter of the artficed body.<sup>537</sup> The signification of any meaningful worldview other than mere artifice and surface for their own sake is disrupted by the formal materiality of the novel and its encrustation of texts. These keep referring back to the undermining artifice of the novel itself – the lack of a stable reality outside of textuality. The gemlike structures of *mise-en-abyme* between the intertexts on the surface, the surface as a primary adaptation in the text, and the pursuits of Des Esseintes, confer the same frustrating experience onto the reader as is felt by the character: the tantalisation of something beyond artifice and surface, and the inability to reach it.

The reader, experiencing compressed narrative and fragmented meaning, is caught between the text and its synecdochical reflections in the adaptations, the micro-adaptations, and other intertextual citations. Between the mirrors of *mise-en-abyme*, the reader experiences empty repetitions which suggest a breakdown of meaning, where the ornate abundance of polished surfaces belies their disrupted ability to speak of anything profound.<sup>538</sup> Des Esseintes too is caught in his artifices, where aesthetics are beginning to place him within the abyss of non-meaning, of technological reproduction, of unthinkingly replicated bodies, instead of delivering him to his own authored sphere of adapted Nature. Instead of the decay and then artificing of the source texts drawn from the real, the novel as a whole sees a progression of artificing into decay through the dynamics of its surfaces and the bodies they encircle; the uncanny return of the decaying body.

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<sup>537</sup> In fact the Moreau paintings are celebrated for the way that they artifice the body of the dancer, who had “always repelled the artistic advances of fleshly painters, like Reubens who travestied her as a Flemish butcher’s wife” (Huysmans, 1956: 52).

<sup>538</sup> This is the ‘abyssal’ theme of *mise-en-abyme*, its vague significations of aesthetic nihilism in the breakdown of meaning through repetitions (Snow, 2016: 17).

As the surface of *À rebours* as an adaptation of Nature becomes more intertextually ornamented, the meaning it conveys decays further away from the aesthetic mysticism which is the ideal sought by Des Esseintes in Decadent artifice. It becomes more fragmented, shallow, more inward-looking, as the weight of reflexivity mounts. The narrative is atomised and compressed into an inconsequential stasis, just as Des Esseintes' imaginary haven is "immobile," a distaste for movement which might be seen as "the outward sign of an inner spiritual deterioration" (Antosh, 1986: 36). The borders of the text's body are rendered porous by the multiple other texts and media forms introduced to it - an accompanying outer deterioration - referring outwards and highlighting its materiality even as they fragment its uniformity. Navarette (1998: 5) sees *fin de siècle* horror as frequently employing this combination of linguistic generation and structural instability, where evil bursts through the calm surfaces of normality in a doubled, formal version, and stylistics are anxiogenic.

The instability of reflexivity, of the text as relating anything beyond its own status as an ornamental container, a gilded carapace over a decaying and withered corpse, is introduced with each foregrounded reminder of the textual universe of which it is a part, as well as its own constructed nature. By its conclusion, the novel has collapsed like Des Esseintes' project,<sup>539</sup> weakened by a decay brought by its own adaptations, reaching only an unsatisfying conclusion that renders what has gone before flat, the palimpsest opaque, Nature reconstituted by the failure of its stylising adaptation. By the time we reach Des Esseintes' cry to God (Huysmans, 1956: 204) for a delivering meaning, only the surface of the novel remains. Its potentially profound pretensions to aesthetic mysticism through style, explained through the character's doctrines and the reflections between form and content, have been revealed as empty through their action on Des Esseintes, who becomes a symptom.

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<sup>539</sup> Ivory says that Decadence attempts to "respond to the complexities of modernity by inventing and reinventing things that will fall apart" (2016: 107).

The adaptive surface of the novel as an ornamentation engendering dissolution is a process of artificing into decay which might be figured in terms of entropy, drawing together these two key themes and describing the process whereby the decay of meaning is a collapse induced by the complexities of ornamentation. Artifice, and adaptation as a mode of artifice, can be read as increases in ordering within the text; they are elaborations that layer representations upon representations, piling up aesthetic versions that build a more complexly ordered text, an ornamented and crystalline structure. The subsequent decay of meaning that occurs beneath this overburdened surface complexity is in line with broad entropic principles that show a correlation between complexity of order and potential for, and rates of, decay; where the singular fragility of order brings increased potential for collapse (Greene, 2004: 174).

The more ordered an object or organism, the more it is prey to entropy, the more chance it has of becoming disordered due to the increased amount of ways it can become disordered (Greene, 2004: 156-7) - as in the difference between a heap of sand and a sand-castle. The latter, being more complexly ordered, has far more chance of becoming the former than vice versa, and progresses far more swiftly and drastically into states of disorder (with correlative decreasing acceleration) than the pile of sand, whose entropic arc of disorder is far less acute, and less discernible. In the same way, a text with a higher degree of Decadent artificiality might be thought of as exhibiting a higher degree of artificial order in the suggestion of meaning by formal and narrative structures. Like the sand-castle, its meaning for an observer relies on intricacies of form which are easily disrupted. Artificiality might be thought of as an order imposed by authorship, in terms of Decadent stylisation; where each interaction with an authorial contact increases complexity.<sup>540</sup> The reliance on specific modes

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<sup>540</sup> For the creator or adapter is a complex system which then becomes interlinked with the work through shaping it.



of reception in adaptation (i.e. palimpsestuous reading) similarly interlinks systems in particularly ordered ways.

Each added adaptation, micro-adaptation, or intertextual fragment might be thought of as increasing complexity through referring outside of the text to another work which is layered upon the extant one to some degree, as well as linking in the interrelationships with other complex systems. When these are also acknowledged, self-referential in echoing aspects of the whole, and self-reflexive for the reader, the degree of surface complexity is much higher than most works whose surface does not have such a level of acknowledged ornamentation. Meaning might be thought of as much more unstable when encoded in such specific ways, and much more prone to an entropic decay into non-meaning. The fragmentary multitudinousness of the Decadent adaptation of Nature is a contributing factor: a cairn will crumble before a single rock of the same mass. Through many factors, but particularly through their use and style of adaptation, Decadent texts might be thought of as low entropy systems (highly ordered) (Greene, 2004: 154) which therefore carry a high tendency towards disorder: the decay of meaning which is the undermining of their status as signifying texts, the revelation of their reductive materiality, and the ontological emptiness beneath collapsing surfaces.

The highly artificial text of 'heavily' ornate surfaces, whose micro-adaptations (interacting with sustained adaptations) rupture the immersive process of reception to contribute to a decay of the text into non-meaning, is a fragile body full of other bodies. For the reader, the entropy of the text collapsing into the disordered state which is a revelation of its own textuality - rather than a mimetic immersion which holds the reader within its world - is effected by a decaying of the invisibility or transparency of forms. As forms become more visible, the decay principle of textual entropy increases, and the ordered experience of imaginative immersion becomes more disordered, with the text's materiality impinging on the reading experience. Even as it is read, the text falls apart in the memory,<sup>541</sup> both in form

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<sup>541</sup> Reed (1985: 133) sees this as characteristic of Decadent texts in any medium.

and meaning. This entropy is the mechanism within the process of revelation previously described as irresolute adaptive receptivity within the adaptation of Nature, and the mystical associations of the curations which cannot endure. It is a direct result of the artificiality of texts, of which adaptation is a significant component in *À rebours*. In Huysmans' novel, as formal complexity increases through authorship, entropic disorder - as a failure to signify profoundly - increases in parallel.

Artifice, self-referentiality, and self-consciousness all create a type of ornamental complexity that increases the entropic potential of a text, heavily encrusting a surface that becomes increasingly susceptible to further fragmentation and decay. This decay process is the way that artificial texts reveal their levels of artifice to the reader.<sup>542</sup> It is decay as a textual function, a process of reception based in the formal attributes of Decadent style and heightened by artificial complexities such as adaptation. Decay is an essential process for the way in which *À rebours* reveals its structures of (non)meaning, the way in which the form of the text, its body, relates its ontology to the reader through materiality as well as narrative. Decay can be seen to be encoded into the formal structures of *À rebours* in the same way as artifice, and, as both are interrelated, they are also related to the use and function of the novel's sustained and fragmentary adaptations.

By the end of the novel, the text is able to speak only in a decayed cadence of fragmented surface aesthetics. The last few chapters are far more fragmented by Des Esseintes' unbidden memories and sensory experiences, which rupture the reveries and catalogues, as his disintegrating body is reflected by the text itself. The chapters of the first half of the novel give an impression of building fragments up; after the vision of syphilis, when memories start to become more uncanny, and the body intrudes more frequently, the chapters and sections give an impression of breaking down, where, for the reader, from

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<sup>542</sup> Suffocating them to reveal the layers of De Quincey's palimpsest (1845).

Chapter Thirteen onwards the memory of episodes or themes of sections becomes far more difficult to recall, once read.

Instead the progression is of the imposition of the body, and a rising sense of oppression. The dichotomy between modes of embodiment still reigns, and biological bodies cannot be aestheticised: the novel becomes hostile to its reader in its evocation of the sickening body of Des Esseintes, reflecting the transience and putrefaction of Nature in the descriptions of illness and hints at a “final phase” (Huysmans, 1956: 186). Irresolution remains in the fragmentations, reflecting that emptiness which turns Des Esseintes back towards Nature and religion as coherent systems of meaning, and in the character’s corporeal mirroring of the body of the text, irresolution becomes somatic. The text’s body collapses inwards in an abjection of the textual body. Abjection arises in its utmost form from the corpse, when “seen without God and outside of science” (Kristeva 1982: 4),<sup>543</sup> death returning from repression to communicate the entropic materiality of the subject. In the text/body allegory, the fragmenting, putrefying text enacts a similar, if deferred, trauma, dragging the character and the reader towards “the place where meaning collapses” (Kristeva, 1982: 2).

Decadent style is abject, as the decaying corpse of an extant and previously living form (Nature), ornamented and studied for its beautiful decay; this is also a model for adaptations, as well as being an adaptation in itself. Adaptations are themselves abject; they are corpses, fallings-away, revenants, uncanny reanimations, composites and border-crossers. They are already uncanny, because they are doubles and returns. They decay the source,<sup>544</sup> or mourn it, where abjection is similarly a “violence of mourning” (1982: 16) for an always-lost object. Like adaptation, the abject is process and product - an “alchemy” transforming the death drive in a new beginning, a “resurrection” of the ego after death, a thing and a becoming. Before the resurrection occurs, the ‘showing’ must corrupt meaning for the subject and enact a death;

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<sup>543</sup> i.e. removed from matrices of meaning.

<sup>544</sup> Corruption being the most obvious appearance of the abject (Kristeva, 1982: 16).

this is what *À rebours* does in its entropic collapse beneath the weight of its adaptive surface. Through the entropic potential of their construction, surfaces suggest that the transient body is all that is left to the Decadent. In this sense, Nature and its materialities return through a decay which emerges uncannily from the Decadent's own authorial project, which had attempted to defer them. The novel reflects the architext/memory palace palimpsest.

The text fails the reader just as Des Esseintes' body fails him, to leave both desiring meaning beyond materiality. Aesthetic time is ruptured, shown to be fallacious, and where adaptation had appeared as a potential artificial bulwark against Nature, transposing it into style, the over-complexification of these defences brings them down, in both house and novel. The reader experiences - through the text's gilded body after the veils have fallen away,<sup>545</sup> as Herod does in *The Apparition* through Salome's paroxysms - a mediated approximation of the horror of Des Esseintes' failed project: the decapitation of Decadent transcendence.<sup>546</sup>

### The Adaptive Afterlife of Texts: Entropy and Generative Decay

Whilst thus far entropy has been utilised to consider the ways in which the adaptations of *À rebours* engage with formal and structural versions of the themes of artifice and decay in order to communicate an impression of the Decadent ontology, these ideas of entropy and decay might be extrapolated further into more generalised principles for Adaptation Studies. Entropy is a way of conceptualising the progressively re-organising forces to which matter is

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<sup>545</sup> For in the moment of revelation "she is almost naked; in the heat of her dance her veils have fallen away and her brocade robes slipped to the floor, so that now she is clad only in wrought metals and translucent gems" (Huysmans, 1956: 54).

<sup>546</sup> "Under the brilliant rays emanating from the Precursor's head," in the glare of the return of Nature, the gemlike fragments of the intertextual collection - "every facet of every jewel" - "catches fire," becoming hostile to the body they adorn. This catching fire is the revelation of empty surface materiality that leads to collapse, and Huysmans hammers home the point by making the *ekphrasis* visually intense for the reader and using its excess to highlight and return us to the body itself: "the stones burn brightly, outlining the woman's figure in flaming colours, indicating neck, legs and arms with points of light, red as burning coals, violet as jets of gas, blue as flaming alcohol, white as moonbeams" (1956: 55).

prey. Adaptation can be considered similarly; as a way to examine the forces of mutability in terms of textual matter, using a broadly entropic framework. This is especially relevant in Decadent texts, for the theories of Boltzmann and others in determining the second law of thermodynamics were formulated and disseminated during the nineteenth century, and interpretations of theories of entropy had a significant influence on the ideas of the *fin de siècle* (Petlevski, 2015: 266), perhaps being ‘troped’ in *À rebours* and its use of adaptations.<sup>547</sup>

Aesthetics traditionally seems to oppose entropy, assigning a dominant position to order, after Greek models, and yet, while the nineteenth century was just as aware of the ‘anabolic’ tendency towards order, the ‘catabolic’ processes of grinding down resonated more potently with cultural ideas of the *fin de siècle* (Arnheim, 1971: 32). This is contributed to by the decline motif of history crystallised by Gibbon (1776) in the previous century,<sup>548</sup> as well as the negative reading of Darwin’s natural selection (1859), a reading which focused on devolution - particularly in France (Arnheim, 1971: 8). In this degeneration interpretation, the symptoms of an inverse adaptation (in its biological sense) are found in all walks of life, seeming to indicate a paradoxical eschatological teratology, leading to the vogue for symptomatology seen in Bourget and other commentators on Decadence. It is a recognition of a structural impulse progressing towards highly ordered complexity, yet one which enmeshes this within a framework of pure catabolic entropy. Decadence itself, in its aesthetics of decay,

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<sup>547</sup> Indeed, Arnheim has posited a direct link between the emergence of theories of entropy and mid-nineteenth-century works dealing with themes of pessimism and dissolution; he cites *Les Fleurs du Mal* as a prime example (1971: 8). It is not difficult to see a correspondence between the kind of “cosmic memento mori” (1971: 8) which entropy seems to imply, and the predominant ideas of degeneration in the social and aesthetic theories of commentators such as Nordau. Indeed, Arnheim sees Nordau as symptomatic of the pessimism of the times, within which negative framings of entropy became incorporated.

<sup>548</sup> Petlevski identifies this as a view of history shaped by physics (2015: 266), which “haunted many articulations in the period” (Luckhurst and Ledger, 2000: xvi). Science was having an increasing influence on the arts in the *fin de siècle* (as examined by Taylor (2000)), evident in Naturalism’s inspiration by *The New Science* (Luckhurst and Ledger, 2000: xvi).

its caricaturing of symptoms, would seem to be an art of entropy, emerging from the same cultural/historical views as Nordau.<sup>549</sup>

Aside from contributing to an entropy of collapsing meaning in the abject textual body of *À rebours*, adaptations might also be seen to reveal and participate in a different, yet more general and constant process of textual entropy that reflects that of matter.<sup>550</sup> The manifestations of mediatisation, of textual embodiment, can be read as peaks or clumps of authorial order in the mutability of content, versions which are structures of complexity formed from the decay of previous versions, and prey to decay themselves. Here decay is not an aspect of collapsing meaning, but the engine driving the transferability of content (and its ghostings of form) between individual manifestations of texts. It is part of the process of adaptation. Embodiment in individual forms highlights a transient temporality which mirrors that of matter, but the textual re-embodiment which a focus on adaptation highlights (as an aspect of every text), suggests an entropic impermanence which actually approaches something more akin to aesthetic time in its escaping of singular instantiation.<sup>551</sup>

However, each time decaying content<sup>552</sup> is formalised into a new order, a new manifestation or version<sup>553</sup> it becomes trapped again in matter. This physical materiality echoes organic entropy and biological death; recalling the human life circumscribed by decay. This is because texts are mediated in paper, celluloid, silicon - even memory; all materials which are embedded in the decaying corporeality of matter's complex structures, whether

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<sup>549</sup> If *À rebours* is parody (and Huysmans never seemed sure whether it was (Ziegler, 2004: 339)), it mocks these ideas of cultural devolution. If it is not (and of course this is not necessarily an either/or) then it shows a fatalistic and appropriative participation in this grand narrative of decline (Lyytikäinen sees Decadent texts as allegories for the sick world (2016: 16)). Huysmans certainly saw little hope in the future, with its "avenue of abominations" (Letter to Leclair, 1900), yet this attitude is also found in relationships to the past and the present (Baldick, 1955: 483): it is only in the aesthetic past that a haven seems at first possible, and is then found to be a dead end in *À rebours*.

<sup>550</sup> This is in addition to engaging with the notion that individual versions of texts are also prey to the very same entropy of matter in their material nature as products.

<sup>551</sup> The adaptive mysticism previously discussed.

<sup>552</sup> See Elliott (2003) for figurative models exploring the manner in which this form/content split occurs.

<sup>553</sup> As examined by Bryant (2002).

animate or not, which fragment toward a more irreversible disorder.<sup>554</sup> The fact that most works of art are complex, in their harnessing of the 'structural theme' to create their order, where the creative process is a striving towards orderliness, creates the result that artworks are particularly prey to catabolic processes which make up the traditional lay reading of entropy (Arnheim, 1971: 27-29). Even if, like memory and imagination, adaptation hints at textual existences beyond the body, textual structures of physical embodiment are prey to similar modes of transience to biological bodies in their requirement of materiality.

Silicon as a prevalent modern embodiment of material textualities is particularly evocative for demonstrating the impossibility of escaping material entropy's decay (and its significations for the human subject) when texts are embedded in matter. Silicon as a medium for information emphasises the low entropy of all manifested creations, and recalls the previously evoked image of the sand-castle, the ordered and fragile structure which, once prey to decay, according to probability, will almost certainly never be reconstituted. All names "stamped on these lifeless things" (Shelley, 1818) are actually writ in water, for even cloud storage must somewhere be embedded in silicon memory - silicon made of sand; the most complex of sand-castles, the most treacherous foundation. With their incredibly low entropy, decay will be swift in returning microchips to the state of disorder: the "lone and level sands" (Shelley, 1818) at the bottom of the hourglass. It is only when freed from representation in material media, or between these, that adaptation can signify a different kind of entropy from that of meaning, or of matter.

This is also true for *À rebours*. The matter-bound textual entropy which mirrors organic entropy, alternately deferred and exposed by adaptations, is one which Decadent texts like *À rebours* highlight particularly, due to their artifices of ornamentation, their heightened order conferred by fragmentary adaptations which dwell on materiality, and their

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<sup>554</sup> Jean Arp testifies to this couching of art in senescence, "the decay that begins immediately on completion of the work," where "sun and heat make blisters, disintegrate the paper, crack the paint [...] the dampness creates mould [...] the work falls apart, dies" (Arp, 1948).

decay of meaning into the pure corporeality of style. The fragmentation shown by adaptations in *À rebours*, where texts break apart and survive piecemeal in the bodies of other texts,<sup>555</sup> actually heightens the notion of organic entropy even as it strives for a textual entropy that appropriates the process. This is due to the highlighting of materiality and links between organic bodies and textual bodies throughout the text, which seeks to find a bodily version of adaptive entropy, but only overlays organic entropy upon the bodies of texts.

Adaptation as participating in or revealing a process of textual entropy separate from the biological - and from the relationships between the two in *À rebours* - requires clarification. All texts might be seen to be prey to an interpretive entropy; where the concept becomes a figuration for the afterlife of the text in more ways than the physicality of media.<sup>556</sup> As products, adaptations might be read as moments plucked from a constant process of general entropic change which flows from each textual version.<sup>557</sup> Entropy as a concept for the afterlife of texts is useful precisely because it emphasises the falling away from the initial form upon which adaptations are particularly predicated. This reintroduces ideas of textual decay as important to adaptation within a broader map of the textual afterlife, and is a different kind of decaying of the text than the views which might see it as falling apart into the cultural consciousness;<sup>558</sup> instead, in this model, the 'cultural consciousness' moves into the text.

If the instantiated existence of the text is an entropy, a gradual progression from order to disorder,<sup>559</sup> decay as a concept needs to be renegotiated within this. This order-to-disorder

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<sup>555</sup> e.g. the pieces of criticism and notional *ekphrases* of edition which micro-adapt literary texts to *À rebours*.

<sup>556</sup> Hutcheon and Stam see adaptations as offering a textual afterlife (2006: 176; 2005i: 75).

<sup>557</sup> A different idea to the more specific adaptive engagement that creates each version, and can be more temporally bracketed as an authorial engagement. The authorial interaction is both a decay of the text and an ordering of it within new elements, a collaging which imposes a structural theme - "what the thing is about" according to Arnheim (1971: 41) - allowing a progression which builds up order even within the macro processes of increasing disorder.

<sup>558</sup> e.g. Eco's 'cult object' (1986: 198).

<sup>559</sup> Where disorder is the dissolution of an improbable arrangement of order (Arnheim, 1971: 13).



progression, the inevitable mutability that mirrors in the text's more ephemeral 'existence' the progression of the matter its body is instantiated within,<sup>560</sup> is a change brought by interpretation. Every time a text is experienced, whether in a direct reading, or even in a second-hand description (or more deferred interactions), the text is deformed somewhat, it decays away from its 'classical' original embodiment, as in Bryant's reception fluidity (2002: 1-2). This occurs even without audience engagement: even if the author leaves the manuscript locked in a drawer, never experienced, that text alters over time. It is altered by its author's changing perception of it, based on personality, experience, etc., and it is also altered by the march of context, of cultural change, as Stam describes in the 'openness' of texts, infinitely mutating under their various influences (2004: 15). This requires a posited observer who could potentially experience it at different instances in order to consider this hypothetical text and its hypothetical change, but it illustrates the principle: all texts are prey to an interpretive decay in their entropic textual afterlife.

This decay is a disordering of the original highly ordered (low entropy) structure, which has a higher degree of order because there are more ways in which it may become disordered (Greene, 2004: 155). Arnheim sees a "lack of correspondence between outer and inner order" producing "a clash of orders" which is the element of disorder (1971: 3), rather than a mere absence of order (1971: 11). In the current reading, this might refer to the change in a text's meaning through interpretation, and the conflicting rate of change (or lack thereof) in its form and content. The disparity between the two constitutes the disorder of decay. Entropy in this instance is the observation of how much disorder has been introduced to the system. As a text becomes more disordered by conflicting interpretations, there are (slightly) fewer ways in which it can become more disordered. This is more evident in the direct interactions with texts by readers, spectators, and audiences, where each reading can be seen to fragment the text in a specific way; to introduce a gap of potentiality to the text, a division, a

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<sup>560</sup> The materiality of media mentioned previously.

rearrangement that allows a possible new version of that text to emerge, and loosens the integrity of the 'original.' Fragmentation is an important aspect of this entropy, for it allows the clash of disorders, the catabolic processes to emerge between systems. The ideas are therefore predicated upon mereological relationships, as is Decadence.<sup>561</sup>

Each of the potential versions, each of these interpretive alterations which decay the first instantiation, are an adaptation-in-waiting, a different version of that text, prior to manifestation. Each interaction is a slightly accelerated version of general entropic decay,<sup>562</sup> this being the authorial and cultural perspectives, though these too have their own changes in velocity (i.e. a major life or historical event, respectively). The interpretation of a reader experiencing a text is a decay of that text, a progression of its entropy; a more disordered version, due to being more fragmented and diverse. Each text can be seen to be prey to a version of this decaying into other texts at all times, even before those other texts are begun. Readers replace the memorial and subjective intertexts of the author with their own in experiencing the textual material;<sup>563</sup> this reception is one which decays the 'purity' of the whole to burrow personal intertexts into it, and is part of the pleasure of experiencing a text. It is also one which is a decay enacted by interpretation under the sign of a text's entropy, a mutability which prepares the text for adaptation, reassesses it, maintains its relevance through renovations of active reading.

Adaptation relies on this textual decay, being a creative process based in the entropic afterlife of texts. To move from the slightly accelerated entropic decay of reception and interpretation, to the adaptations which are the more noticeable changes in the entropic afterlife, an authorial agency is required that has an intentionality of creation beyond the

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<sup>561</sup> Order requires a grasping of both overall structure and a degree of its detail (Arnheim, 1971: 2), whilst disorder arrives with the Decadent dynamic of parts becoming independent and destabilising the whole (1971: 13).

<sup>562</sup> Which might be thought of as textual senescence.

<sup>563</sup> Recalling the ideas of active reception explored in Chapter One.

imposed decay of interpretation. It must select a snapshot of decay, a version selected from the flow, to instantiate (and once this has been completed it will be subject to the same process). Here another degree of acceleration is introduced to the model, for after a particular version of the text's interpretive decay is selected for adaptation,<sup>564</sup> the text must be decayed more purposefully. This is the kind of authored decay as adaptation already glimpsed in *À rebours*, where a source is fragmented in order to be ornamented.<sup>565</sup> This is a vastly accelerated entropic decay, undertaken by authorial interveners in natural entropy, and therefore a more artificial version. It is the critical reading which disassembles the source as part of the "surgical art" (Abbott, 2002: 108) of adaptation. In the Decadent process of adaptation, it occurs prior to the lapidation of the source, in order to use fragments of the 'original' in the new version to be reconstituted. Adaptation as an authored decay requires the framework of general textual entropy and its fragmentations to make texts available to it, to create the interpretive gaps for subjective intertexts to burrow within and perforate the integrity of the source in order to form new versions.

Adaptations induce an accelerated decay in their authorial agency not only within the bracketed instance of interaction (which shades off either side into general entropy), but also due to the fact that each adaptation must increase the artificial complexity of the adapted source text by overlaying more readings. Palimpsests which engender specific readings-between are highly-wrought in their ordering. This means that while source texts increase in disorder within adaptive entropy, the adaptation is a more highly ordered structure than its source, and both statements are often true of the same text. Fragmentations are increased through more widely known interpretive gaps, and so each adaptation (like the chains in *À rebours*) increases interactive complexity and the status of the texts as low entropy forms, making them more likely to decay faster into further fragmentation.

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<sup>564</sup> A combination of the adapter's personal reading, and the general decay in terms of other interrelated readings of which the adapters are aware, as well as those imposed by context.

<sup>565</sup> Explored first in terms of adapting Nature as a source text.

Both meaning and form/content matrixes are prey to the process. Meaning is an even lower entropy structure, more prone to decay in both an authorial and general sense, due to being more artificial and fragile.<sup>566</sup> Meaning engages more essentially with authors and audiences, so is therefore more unstable and subject to change. Meaning will subsequently decay into new forms first,<sup>567</sup> and this decay of meaning brings increased interpretive perforations. The resultant interpretive gaps in meaning are then tunnelled through into form/content first by readers, and then subsequently by adapters, where each engagement accelerates textual decay.

In considering this model of adaptation, it is clear that order progressing to disorder cannot be the only force within the entropic afterlife of texts. The first half of adaptation as process may disassemble texts in an accelerated decay, but the second half of the process - that which was considered as lapidation in terms of the texts of Nature - is not purely fragmentation, for there is a curatorial resetting of fragments in new frameworks.<sup>568</sup> Each instance of adaptation is an example of generative decay, the kind of decay suggested at other points in the thesis, such as in the adaptation of Nature, where decay is an elaboration. It corresponds to the lecture given by Robert Ross, Wilde's literary executor in 1908, which stated that "what is commonly called decay is merely stylistic development" (cited in Murray & Hall, 2013: 1). Decadent style has been shown to decompose the world before artificing it, where decay becomes a figure for authorial agency, a measurement of creative artifice signifying infidelity to that source - and the same is true of its engagement with previously represented intertexts.

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<sup>566</sup> An aspect exacerbated in *À rebours* by the retention of gaps in fragmentariness and irresolution.

<sup>567</sup> Into nothing in the case of *À rebours* - an in-built 'guide' to reception conferring the ontology of its aesthetic philosophy, relying on textual entropy accelerated by self-authored decay.

<sup>568</sup> As in the micro-adaptations or acknowledged intertexts which form the intertextual surface of the architext to signify artifice.

Generative decay is a figure for the textual force of adaptive authorship within textual entropy which can simultaneously encompass the purposeful fragmentation of the source, and its partial resurrection; forming the new even as it breaks down the extant.<sup>569</sup> It builds on and extends Elliott's figurative model of hermeneutic decomposition,<sup>570</sup> and is antecedent to more recent (when compared to Decadence) conceptions of entropy as a diversity necessary for the evolution of ordered systems (Shaw & Davis, 1983: 135). It is more akin to the Medieval concept of putrefaction than the negatively cast entropic devolution of much *fin de siècle* discourse. John Dumbleton<sup>571</sup> considered whether prime materials existed or whether all is generated via alteration, dwelling "on the generation of substances by like substances and of animals by complete animals and by putrefaction" (Sylla, 2008: 609). This is a recasting of decay in terms of a recycling that recalls Leitch's ecology of texts (2017: 700).<sup>572</sup>

In some of the philosophical considerations of related ideas in the Middle Ages, the necessity of decay was emphasised in a way that is more conducive to how it might be seen to function as a principle of adaptation within textual entropy: as "a problem too intimate with the world of beings or the *explicatio* of the universe to be brushed aside on emotional or rational grounds" (Negarestani, 2010: 379). Negarestani invokes the obscure Henry of Langenstein, who posited a philosophical problem of generative decay encapsulated in a bizarre image, discussing the possibility of a fox being born from the corpse of a dog. In this example of the seeming illogicality of generative decay to consciousnesses so mired in fleeting and singular embodiment, decay is a perverse and iconoclastic Ovidian force, an

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<sup>569</sup> Just as fragmentation can be an analytic procedure which allows for new beginnings (Mathews, 2000: 3).

<sup>570</sup> Where the reception process occasions a corruption of the whole which allows various versions of a text to merge with cultural narratives to be recomposed as the newly hybrid adaptation (Elliott, 2003: 157-9).

<sup>571</sup> In *Summa of Logic and Natural Philosophy* (c. 1349), which contains a pertinent section (VIII) building upon Aristotle's 'On Generation and Corruption.'

<sup>572</sup> Similarly, a revisionist look at the original period labelled Decadent and characterised by decay - the late Roman and Early Medieval - shows the common formulation of decay as a result of prejudices born from privileging an arbitrary 'original' (the Classical ideal) and where what has been seen as decay was merely 'adjustment' (Bark, 1958: 65). This recalls both Havelock Ellis and the fidelity argument in Adaptation Studies.

unpredictable process that may contain miracles. It is not dissolution, but metamorphosis.<sup>573</sup> With advancing entropy, a text may decay like Eco's 'cult object' into fragments (1986: 198) as changes in context and readings introduce disorder. In the perforations engendered by interpretation it may come to resemble an entirely different text in the cultural consciousness, and this text may then emerge in a corporeal manifestation (through adaptation's generative decay) - the fox from the dog - wherein the process begins again.

Here decay is not annihilation, but an adaptation which brings the first law of textual thermodynamics to bear upon the second: an engine for the conservation of energy, a field of differential potential. This is more in keeping with adaptation's eco-historical valency, recalling Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' (1857), which, though its main thrust is as a *vanitas* or *memento mori*, still carries in its belly the ideas of generative decay within the natural realm:

The sun shone down upon that putrescence,  
As if to roast it to a turn,  
And to give back a hundredfold to great Nature  
The elements she had combined;

And the sky was watching that superb cadaver  
Blossom like a flower.

[...]

One would have said the body, swollen with a vague breath,  
Lived by multiplication.

(Baudelaire, 1987: 28)

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<sup>573</sup> Sanders also sees Ovid's tales as providing a template for adaptation (2005: 64).

Baudelaire frequently highlights the creative potential of decomposition (Grotta, 2015: 101), and this image evokes a decay which, with a shift in perspective, becomes generative, able to blossom. The corpse appears to be on the brink of birth, of speaking, and here nature's cycles of entropy are shown to enact their own adaptations, seemingly stripped of the uncanniness Des Esseintes sees in them. *À rebours'* adaptive style is also evoked in the multiplicity of the corpse, where in the process of adaptation it becomes fragmented, particularised in a partial unity of articulate irresolution.

In Baudelaire's poem, decay becomes subject matter in its own right, but it also gets linked to the process of poetic creation, to an adaptation of decaying sources. Baudelaire himself actually achieves the miracle of generative decay - as posited by Henry of Langenstein - poetically, in his use of this decaying source image, Nature's intertext of combined elements distilled into a poetic image and represented. It is an important poem for Huysmans in its hints towards generative decay, in its treatment of putrefaction as a worthy subject for poetry - but also in the ideas of mutability, of the unified decayed into a fragmentary multitude, the mass of parts which may signify more in their separateness than the whole, recalling the mereological nature of the adaptation which is the mosaic of the Decadent text.

Negarestani in his discussion of Langenstein evokes ideas of "the blurring movements of rot" engendered by "vermicular liquidation" (2010: 380) in a suggestive set of images for ideas of interpretation and criticism. They might be read as figuring the ways in which vermiculate readers burrow into texts in their interpretations, inducing perforations which loosen the integrity of textual bodies, and might be utilised in the fragmentations of more active decomposition taken up by adapters, and where gradations of putrefaction allow different forms to emerge at different stages in the decay. While adaptation is a version of this mechanism of decay (process), an adaptation is one of the forms taken when the text becomes an extrapolated form (product), rather than just a blurred version of its original self, which remain only potential adaptations.

Some of these points might be further refined through a consideration of decay's effects in terms of an idea appropriated from Benjamin: that of porosity. This can be thought of as the mark of entropy and decay on the text. It suggests the ways in which texts decay to make them susceptible to adaptation, and explores the particular fragmentation present in the interpretation which begins the adaptive process. Benjamin's essay 'Naples' (1925), written with Asja Lacis, discusses an idea of urban porosity in certain city spaces, where a link between the human and the architectural allows for a lack of fixity in arrangement, an impermanence and mutability. In these spaces the writers see a passion for improvisation dominating the usage of architecture, an organic growth where each constellation preserves its potential to become other versions. The porous city is metamorphic and transient, open to repurposing, where private and public spaces blur. It is a city of functional interpenetrations in a "continual process of discontinuous transformation" (Mare, 2008: 204), a mutability that destabilises the perception of time and space, where the observer cannot tell if the architecture is in a process of decay or restoration.

The mutability effected by textual decay, by perforations that allow for a rearranging adaptation, is similar to this porosity in the city, where fragmentation prompts a constant process of recombination. The perforations induced by adaptive interpretation are not a devolution,<sup>574</sup> but a generative decay that allows the new to be born through the destabilising of rigidity and permanence, and the fragmentation that creates the spaces and mobility necessary for rearrangement in new configurations. Porosity as the presence of adaptive decay and its fragmentations in the text is dynamic and iconoclastic, a recycling and renovation which determines a 'usable past,' allowing it to remain relevant and in dialogue with the new, rather than stultified and envitrined. Adaptation allows for temporal coexistence in its ability to mediate fragments of the past; enriching the present, whilst retaining the future's field of potential. The adaptive museum is a dynamic space, not a purely

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<sup>574</sup> Unless one invests too heavily in the primacy of the original form's purity.



preservative one, and the porosity brought by adaptation allows for the rearrangement which, in ideas such as dialogism, destabilises easy temporal conceptions of growth or decay, prompting more fluid ideas of rearrangement and becoming, which remove the myth and primacy of originality.

Decadent texts like *À rebours* might be seen to have in-built structural porosity.<sup>575</sup> As previously explored, fragmentation and the collapse of meaning are incorporated within *À rebours*, and this presents the work as a compendium,<sup>576</sup> or a breviary for use by other writers.<sup>577</sup> The parts are independent and therefore detachable, because the form begins from a level of porosity and decay further along its process of textual entropy than many others. They are able to be unhinged like a cult object (Eco, 1986: 198), where the fragmentariness of Decadent style allows the texts to break apart in the memory and decay into each other, to be inherently predicated towards the kind of adaptive relationships that configure the novel and interior as a museum. Meaning has collapsed beneath surface and is therefore open to replacement. As noted by Bernheimer, the structure itself, incorporating so much alien material, prompts its own re-incorporation (1999: 368).<sup>578</sup> There are also the acknowledged citations of intertexts (adapted through curation into the mosaic of the singular surface text), which burrow within the work from other media forms, destabilising the holism of the text and the form of its body, providing interpretive routes for partial adaptation in media already present in the work.<sup>579</sup>

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<sup>575</sup> Similar to the vagueness identified in Moreau's paintings (Reed, 1985: 147).

<sup>576</sup> A mirrored version of Baudelaire's conception of nature as dictionary (1992: 66).

<sup>577</sup> "Wishing to identify with the sensibility synthesised by Huysmans," many writers have "plundered his prefiguring fiction as a pseudosacred origin" (Bernheimer, 1999: 369), adapting sections as Wilde did for *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1898).

<sup>578</sup> Huysmans' emblems "produced a prolific after-growth in other Decadent texts" according to Lyytikäinen (2016: 19).

<sup>579</sup> For interart analogies suggest intertranslatability, and the potential for tangible interart offspring (Elliot, 2003: 126). Elliott and Wagner (1975) have both argued for adaptations as analogies.

The hybridity of the form hints at other possible forms the whole might take. The low entropy of the whole, and therefore its potential for decay, is increased by its adaptations; both because they complexify its order in terms of formal structures, and because they make its body porous, further along the gradations of decay. In the figurative model of the abject textual body's decaying afterlife, intertexts and readers are both vermiculate. As with Benjamin, porosity places the text in an indeterminate, shifting space between restoration and decay, occupying both of these trajectories at once, highlighting the mutable nature of texts and thereby emphasising the adaptation potential and status of this particular text. This hints towards the fitting nature of adaptation as a route to aesthetic time: for if the arrow of material entropy is blurred by generative decay, and restoration and disintegration resemble each other, an atemporality is seemingly achieved, highlighting the aesthetic mysticism in curatorial adaptation that make it the perfect experimental mode for Huysmans' Decadence.

A text's porosity is a necessary category for its adaptation; there must be some degree of interpretive decay actively present in the text due to modes of entropy in order for it to change enough to become a productive adaptation (e.g. one which does not merely repeat mimetically). Porosity is a vector of generative decay that prevents full dissolution, for it prompts creative interaction in its accessibility and openness; it encourages readers to become as vermiculate in the process as intertexts are in the product.

Porosity invites an interplay of decay and reconstruction that transcends the linearity of textual entropy without adaptations (a textual version of *À rebours'* biological decay), by drawing in authorial engagements. This brings a greater chance for new versions to come into being, shoring up the fragments produced by the porosity of accelerated (authorial) decay. This is an important concept for the readings of Huysmans' use of body/text confections and surfaces in *À rebours*, as well as Des Esseintes' desire for aesthetic time. The next section will draw the concepts of adaptation as a figurative afterlife of texts back into the practice of Huysmans in *À rebours*, to consider how these ideas might be the underpinning of

adaptation's prevalence in the work: a way to transcend embodied entropy through textual entropy, and the relationship of these ideas to the ontology of the novel with the ideas of embodiment and collapse.

### Adaptations and the Uncanny Entropy of Embodiment

In the use of adaptations to create and add to the artifices of surface, it has been contended that bodies in the text, and the body/bodies of the text, become sites for negotiating a potential escape into aesthetic time, and of illustrating the inability of Decadent aesthetics to maintain this. For author and character, they present a means of artificing the biological entropy of Nature, with its empty repetitions of non-generative decay, of un-authored embodiment. They are part of an artifice which strives to harness or access a temporality based in the generative decay of adaptive entropy beyond singular instantiations, an aesthetic mysticism of aura. However, the realm of aesthetic time has also been shown to be unendurable for the biological subject in *À rebours*, who is unable to become an artwork and cannot transpose themselves to the plane of textual and memorial bodies.

The decay of meaning that suffocates Des Esseintes and the reader of *À rebours* is caused by the overburdened surface of their text (whether novel or architext). The text's collapse into emptiness highlights the division between the aesthetic and the biological, as well as reflecting the emptiness found in biological entropy, which is reasserted. The Decadent project's inability to signify anything but surface, and lack of a coherent system of transcendence for anything except textual bodies, denotes the inescapability of Nature's time for the subject.<sup>580</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> At the end of *À rebours* Des Esseintes' "ties binding him to his [aesthetic] present" are broken, and all his future projects are buried in oblivion (Huysmans, 1956: 198).

*À rebours*, and to some extent *En rade* and *Là-bas* - the three being Huysmans' middle or Decadent novels - might be read as depicting in fiction Huysmans' struggle with the materiality of literature encapsulated in his Naturalist period, and, perhaps more significantly, with the materiality of self in his pre-conversion agnosticism. The theme of embodiment is explored and wrestled with frequently in *À rebours* through the combination of analogue, potential panacea, and ultimate *pharmakon* of adaptation as a function of textual bodies seemingly offering a model for an aesthetic afterlife of sublimated entropy, yet which ultimately contributes to the collapse of meaning within the artificial system.

The similar obsessions of other Huysmans characters in his 'middle' period suggest the channelling of authorial concerns into the text, as noted by Baldick (1955: 201) who links their concerns to passages from Huysmans' diary which echo the search for "abiding spiritual content" (1955: 154-5). This is the system of meaning outside of Nature represented by aesthetic time. Jacques Marles and Durtal also strive to inquire into the "possibility of literature as a means of deliverance," seeking sublimation in attempts to "replace the material body with its spiritual or textual counterpart" (Ziegler, 1989: 70).<sup>581</sup> As Des Esseintes searches the realms of artifice and the works of others (curated into his own adapted work) for his transcendence, Durtal in *Là-bas* searches theology and his own texts, writing a fiction of a fiction, adapting historical 'master' texts, a collation of source-fragments which make up a "springboard" for his own adaptation, for which he has no pretensions towards fidelity (Huysmans, 2001: 19). Both characters might be seen to dwell on versions of adapting reality, on modes of textual decay, artifice and curation, as a way to represent the metaphysics of the embodied self in aesthetics.

It might be suggested through the asymptotic reading that Huysmans is also exploring the same ontological debates of embodiment through these characters and the artifice and

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<sup>581</sup> Like Marles, Des Esseintes must leave his "haven" (Huysmans, 1956: 198).

decay of the novel as a text itself. The mutability of the self embedded in Nature<sup>582</sup> is investigated in the adaptive relationships of *À rebours* and its failed search for an aesthetic transcendence in resorting to artifice through his character (Berg, 1978: 43), for a system which sublimates the entropy of the body.

For Huysmans, the corpse and the corpus are made one<sup>583</sup> in order to “rejoice beyond the bounds of time,” for in Huysmans’ own words: “to me the past seems horrible, the present grey and desolate, and the future utterly appalling” (Baldick, 1955: 483).<sup>584</sup> In *Des Esseintes*’ struggles, it seems that Huysmans writes of his experiments with the theology of aesthetics, of artifice and adaptation, as a temporal escapism, a way to sublimate the future’s avenue of abominations. Within this is encoded the fallacy of the method in order to move away from some of its loci in his own personality<sup>585</sup> towards new versions. This perhaps occurs in a purposeful mapping to aesthetics by the author, or perhaps in the manner of a Freudian compulsion, a repetition of trauma in a different form.

This brings entropy into the meaning-structures of the novel’s aesthetics, rather than accentuating its bodily participation in adaptive entropy. Rather than affirming an aesthetic afterlife of generative decay, the novel begins to signify the emptiness of aesthetics, of adaptive collections, and the meaningless transience of multiple individual bodies. The reader is returned to Nature and the biological in the same way that *Des Esseintes* is: through a suffocating piling-up of adaptations which collapse to reveal their own emptiness, their inability to unify and signify an aesthetic afterlife. This abjection in the textual body enforces an uncanny decay-in-life, in reception, rather than decay in the closure of the ‘dead’ text whose form, content, and meaning are unified at its close. Irresolution is a putrefaction in life

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<sup>582</sup> As in Marcus Aurelius’ “wretched soul, appointed to carry a carcass up and down” (IV. xxxiv.).

<sup>583</sup> As with the use of memory intertexts for *Des Esseintes*.

<sup>584</sup> Antosh (1986) and Donato (2004) have both mapped this search for a new temporal architecture across Huysmans’ works, and I would contend that this idea is the same as that addressed by Ziegler (1989) in his examination of cycles of embodiment in *Là-bas*.

<sup>585</sup> In the mode of the exorcising asymptote of Ziegler (2009).

which does not allow the novel to die in anticipation of resurrection, but makes of it a walking corpse of perennial decay,<sup>586</sup> with adaptations like infected wounds on the skin. Ornament becomes decay, and the novel becomes its own deathbed confession.

Adaptation's ability to confer a textual afterlife of sublimated entropy is undermined by its over-usage and style of usage in the text. The repetitions of other texts become empty reproductions, which, rather than giving the audience a participation in an afterlife of generative decay, cause the audience to reject the uncanny doublings, the newly-object textual body. Text, character, and reader then fall away from the tenuous adaptation of the world that was the fragile simulation of house/novel. The intertextual surface becomes a mass of failing cells metastasising uncontrollably<sup>587</sup> within a senescent body signifying its swift progression into disorder.

This idea is present in the allegorical reading of the Salome painting, where, in Huysmans' *ekphrasis*, it is the ornament, the pieces of costume more than anything else, which seem to arouse Herod's lust in their juxtaposing adaptation of the real body. It is the fragmentary surfaces of artifice combining as an irresolute unity which appear to induce the promise of power, conferred by the audience to the text in appreciation, but which actually gifts the power to Herodias: the power over Herod (readers) - for her (Huysmans') power over Salome (novel) was already in place, merely concealed. These artificial segments of the textual body, such as the adaptive parts, transfix the audience (Herod). This transfixion is reflexivity, an interaction with acknowledged artifices and adaptations; the encrusted surface.

These parts - more than the body as a whole - are the focus, and therefore manipulate the audience into giving their power over to the author based on a falsity, granting Herodias/Huysmans their perverse wish, mediated through the text, which is the corruption (decapitation) of meaning. The text's dread ontology appears before it, revealing the entropic

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<sup>586</sup> For Ziegler (2004: 23) it is the fear of being unable to change or complete the exorcism of the asymptote.

<sup>587</sup> Jankelevitch similarly sees this metastasis in the description of detail in the novel (1950: 339).

universe of biological death in a violence of returning flesh and platter-like cycles. The novel convulses to impart the dread ontology to the audience through the paroxysms of its body, where the power is revealed to be only gilded parts of surface giving a momentary appearance of transcendent sensuality. Herod, the spectator, realises his manipulation by the shadowy figure behind the throne, whose encrusting of intoxicating parts on the textual body conferred a power of connection and desire onto that text, ensnaring the spectator to enact the decapitation of the painting's system of meaning, leading to a return of the ultimate uncanny part: the head of John the Baptist.

It is recalled more obviously in the parts of Des Esseintes' own body rebelling against their host form, driving him back to the city; the ultimate mass of overcrowded, proliferating bodies. The same horror erupts in *Là-bas* and *En rade*: a return of parts in the spectre of the city. In this sense there is a horror of biological adaptation, the success of organisms passing on their genetic material to other organisms in an unthinking spread.<sup>588</sup> In the textual version, it is the fragments of adaptation which become the undermining parts.<sup>589</sup> They invert from signifying adaptation's generative decay to instead denoting repetitive biological fragmentation, returning the escapist subject to their body, strapped to the scything hand of the entropic clock. Content is trapped within form, withheld from adaptation, and the body in turn delivers the subject to nature, to other bodies, to the life "which swarms with innocent monsters" (Baudelaire, 2010: 93).

Transcending individual death or the multiple deaths of meaningless biological proliferation, Des Esseintes and Huysmans' creative curations were a corporeally sterile yet textually productive re-staging of Nature according to more exalted principles: principles quickly shown to be no better in their own participation in materialism, embodiment, consumption (as in the consumerism of collecting culture). Huysmans' collecting and writing,

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<sup>588</sup> Which Ziegler (1989: 73) identifies as being particularly present in *Là-bas*.

<sup>589</sup> Taking on the resonances of Elliott's 'genetic' model (2003: 150).

Des Esseintes' *ars memoria* curation of the architext, Durtal's historical fictionalisation; all are routes to aesthetic time. They utilise adaptation as one method to find this, and all become empty in the face of bodily suffering. In fact, they invert to deliver the subject to the heart of that suffering through an excess of adaptation, a metastasis and collapse of the text and its aesthetic philosophy.

Conversely to Des Esseintes, Durtal's problem in *Là-bas* is that he finishes his work: his adaptation is a circumscribed one. Completion is an unusual occurrence among the artists of Huysmans' novels (Antosh, 1986: 73). In this context though, as his work has provided him with an escape, a sublimated textual adaptation which has relieved him of the pressures of the body, the completion of his Gilles de Rais biography is not a triumphant moment, but one which ends the adaptation's artifice as a liveable aesthetic work.<sup>590</sup>

As in *À rebours*, the protagonist finds a method of adaptation that purports to sublimate the world through techniques of artifice: wilful infidelity, simulation, fragmentation, and curation. Similarly, the project fails, becoming a revelator of a paradoxical mutability and repetition: of material bodily cycles defined by a paradox of eternally repeated transience, rather than the auratic repetitions of adaptive entropy under aesthetic mysticism. Bodies within the adaptation themselves become uncanny (Gilles, recalling the Baptist), the adaptations then become uncanny (finished, recalling a suffocation in their sudden stasis), and the protagonist is forced back into biological reality.

*À rebours* is different to *Là-bas* in that this progression is mirrored in the novel's form, its own body of hyper-stylisation. In the latter novel it is signified in the concluding tableaux of sordid adaptations<sup>591</sup> in the Black Mass. Here, the transubstantiated God, present in the

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<sup>590</sup> As Antosh has stated: "the explanation for this apparent success on Durtal's part is, paradoxically, that it is in fact a failure; for once the novel is completed, Durtal will be deprived of his means of escape and thrown back into reality" (Antosh, 1986: 73).

<sup>591</sup> For Satanism is as inherently adaptive as Decadence, always appropriating the structures of Christianity. Huysmans describes this route when discussing the sadism/mysticism split in Catholicism, where sacrilege cannot be "effectively committed except by a believer" (1956: 148).



sacraments, is defiled in a mockery of the horror of embodiment, and an adaptation of the sublimating ritual to an inverted, fleshly version.<sup>592</sup> Instead of the majestic extremities of the evils of Gilles de Rais' aesthetic Satanism in his literary adaptation of textual fragments, Durtal experiences the pitiful and disgusting real version, with its gross bodies, its lack of meaning beyond lust, which is the engine of the organic proliferations and an assailing yet disenchanting force throughout the novel. Durtal lives in his historical subject only "when it is unfinished" (Ziegler, 1989: 74), when it is still "disembodied, unmediated," like the phonograph voice (Picker, 2003: 112), or the adaptive entropy of pure potential, between versions. The finished text places Durtal in the same predicament as Des Esseintes,<sup>593</sup> where the adaptation that was an escape inverts to become the imprisonment in its allegorical natural reflection.

Adaptive ornaments like the Gilles de Rais biography, or like the Salome paintings, the flowers, and the memories within *À rebours*, become parts undermining the whole. Aesthetic entropy morphs into materialist consumption, where the curations of the house have brought no sublimation to Des Esseintes, and no profundity to the novel within which he resides. Both of their bodies fail, returning readers and authors to their own bodies within Nature's temporal architecture. For Ziegler, the "only constant" in *Là-bas* is "Durtal's complaint about the propagation of forms, and his dream of a recourse to religion or art to arrest the sickening flow: of self-reproducing, degraded bodies that, in death, continue to live" (1989: 69). The final chapter of *À rebours* sees Des Esseintes similarly dwelling upon the crowd, the "gale of human folly" (1956: 198), of biological proliferation, to which he must return.<sup>594</sup>

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<sup>592</sup> Ziegler (2009) examines this scene specifically, while Hanson examines the ideas of inverting as profanation in depth (1994: 146)

<sup>593</sup> Though less extreme, for his deferral of Nature was also less so.

<sup>594</sup> Huysmans has Des Esseintes musing on the fact that for most children "it would have been better for them if their mothers had never borne them," that it was "madness" to beget children: "if in the name of pity the futile business of procreation was ever to be abolished, the time had surely come to do it" (1956: 155-6).

Degenerative reproduction as a biological decay across individual forms<sup>595</sup> is also evoked in the assessment of the state of the aristocracy (1956: 199), and the adulteration of the host; the badly authored adaptation which corrupts the “mystery of transubstantiation” (1956: 201) as “commercialism [...] invaded the cloisters” (1956: 199). The ideas extend to art, where the mob’s installation of the consumerist bourgeoisie brings a “deluge of lifeless inanities” (1956: 203) into the world, more uncanny, empty births from mechanical reproductions, only reflecting the masses at the Decadent’s door.

The final page hammers home the point: the “slime” of the bourgeoisie spreads to cover the old world, and Des Esseintes confronts the failure of his haven of texts, his adaptation of fragments. A manservant symbolically carries away a bundle of books,<sup>596</sup> and the Decadent sees that “like a tide-race, the waves of human mediocrity are rising to the heavens and will engulf this refuge” (1956: 204).<sup>597</sup> All that is left is the possibility that faith might save where aesthetics merely returned him to the body/bodies of transient humanity. He cries out to God for help, for “only the impossible belief in a future life could bring him peace of mind” (1956: 204), and the aesthetic afterlife gave him only an adapted past, always returning to the embodied present.<sup>598</sup>

What truly horrifies Huysmans and his protagonists, it seems, is the uncanny return of the entropic afterlife and its cycles once artifice and control have been lost.<sup>599</sup> In *À rebours*, this loss of control becomes an unendurable reflection of nature’s perpetuation within no

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<sup>595</sup> A Nordau-esque sentiment of cultural entropy, introduced in the *ekphrastic* portraits of the novel’s first chapter (or perhaps a Naturalist exploration of heredity).

<sup>596</sup> The fragmentation of his retreat reminds him via his body of the Natural sufferings that await, where in nailing up the packing cases, “every blow seemed to strike at his heart and send a stab of pain deep into his flesh” (Huysmans, 1956: 197).

<sup>597</sup> He is returned to confronting the detested human face, which, “as glimpsed in the street had been one of the keenest torments he had been forced to endure” (Huysmans, 1956: 25).

<sup>598</sup> Des Esseintes does not quite reach conversion, but calls out for one as “the unbeliever who would fain believe” (Huysmans, 1956: 204).

<sup>599</sup> Through completion for Durtal, through a failure of memorial curation for Des Esseintes. For Freud, the uncanny is very much bound up with a loss of subjective control, where the repetition of the same evokes the “helplessness” experienced in dreams (2003: 144).

system of meaning, and a loss of selfhood in organic entropy. The “shimmering dissolution”<sup>600</sup> of the kaleidoscope becomes all and suggests cells instead of texts in its simultaneous decompositions and proliferations. Nature lacks the artifices of authorship, offering only a half-life of inhumation into the cycles of decay, embodiment without spirit, form without content or meaning. *À rebours*’ surface entropy of meaning ushers this in at the end of the novel. The reader too must return with *Des Esseintes* to the world.

The particularisation effected by Natural decay is perhaps not the primary despair of Huysmans’ characters. Instead, it is the coupling of this with a cyclicity of repetition which multiplies and perpetuates it meaninglessly.<sup>601</sup> It is fidelity adaptation. Repetition becomes a reanimation if the object is devoid of meaning: if it has the pure surface of a corpse, like *À rebours* or *Des Esseintes*’ retreat by the end of the work. When the decayed body lacks the meaning conferred by authorship, when it has become hostile to the selfhood it contains, the proliferation of adapted bodies built up throughout actually start to cause harm to the author, forcing them from the retreat back to their own embodiment, and from this to the mass of bodies in Nature. In this effect, they signify not an afterlife beyond embodied time, but an empty present of meaningless decay. The text mirrors the natural in its status as an object for consumption and re-use in a ‘degraded’ physical sense. Ziegler sees Durtal in *Là-bas* as prey to a horror of multiplication, of accretion in the Capitalist mode, an uncanny and multiple existence, perpetuated within texts that wander like “*larves*” through “volumes of futile conjecture,” enduring as “a kind of counterfeit life” (1989: 72).<sup>602</sup>

The haunting ontology of perpetuated existence without meaning is the fear depicted by Benjamin with regards to the object stripped of aura, which persists in an uncanny *durée*

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<sup>600</sup> This phrase is Crary’s, which he uses to describe the kaleidoscope (1990: 116), which in turn Evans (1993) has utilised as a metaphor for Baudelaire’s prose-poem collections. Here it effectively evokes the ornamentation and decay of Decadent surfaces, and their shifting doubleness in the figurative reading.

<sup>601</sup> As suggested by Ziegler in the previous reflection on Durtal.

<sup>602</sup> This might be read as a criticism of mimetic relations to the source, and recalls both the counterfeit of the Gothic and the application of Carlyle’s comments (Carlyle, 1850: 703) to the memory palace.

“from which death has been eliminated,” leaving only “the bad infinity of an ornament,” where, “to his horror, the melancholy man sees the earth revert to a mere state of nature” (2006: 202). This encapsulates concisely the collapse of aesthetic time around the Decadent subject, and the re-inscription of Natural entropy by adaptations which have lost their meaning. Not only do the adaptations collapse meaning and fragment the textual body, but they hint at a similar life for the novel’s textual fragments in other texts, doppelgängers stripped of meaning and the authorship of their creator. Adaptation’s afterlife takes on the entropy of bodily cycles, uncanny life in fragments of decay, rather than vice versa - and the loss of self, even as the body remains in its fragmenting parts. It is not just the decay of the text-body that adaptations bring in the dread of embodiment, but the perpetuation of this experience in an empty multiplicity. This is the revenge of Nature, inverting the curated retreat. The subject is given a glimpse of an afterlife of pure embodiment: fragmentation and consumption.

Ziegler allies these ideas to consumer goods and money in *Là-bas*, for these too proliferate for the sake of proliferation, rather than auratic objects which are sublimated through a curation into a new symbolic order. Money infects religion and literature with “a non-transcendent immortality” (1989: 71) which suggests the non-generative decay and empty entropy of bodies in the textual allegorisations of *À rebours*. The end of *À rebours* conflates these strains, where in the discussions of the crowds of the city, of proliferating bodies, there is constant reference to the bourgeoisie, where Des Esseintes rails against the “aristocracy of wealth” and the “tyranny of commerce” (1956: 202).<sup>603</sup> Money is a version of the persistence of self which is corrupt and purely material, a multiplying thing which cannot achieve transcendence. Like the fidelity adaptation, this creates an uncanny life, not truly living, but a replication of spiritual decay without generation or renewal.

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<sup>603</sup> As previously he has railed against “all the filthiness of contemporary utilitarian ideas, all the money-grubbing ignominy of the age” (Huysmans, 1956: 179).

The Capitalist text of technological reproducibility is a decaying body that will not die, like M. Valdemar in Poe's story (1845), a mimesis perpetuating bodies without lasting adaptive change, without authorship, repeating into meaningless disorder. The soul dies as the body lives. Not only are the adaptations of *À rebours* the return of embodiment, but of embodiment within the Capitalist regime, like the curations, Des Esseintes' technique of adaptation which reveals a return of materialism under the guise of art. For Huysmans' protagonists, adaptation inverts to evoke that which it was mobilised to repress. When authorship fails, textual adaptation - shifting into mimesis - becomes the simulacrum, and therefore doubles uncannily. It suggests a materialist consumption without curation or creation, or anticipates the accumulative, simulacral memory palace of *Funes the Memorious* in Borges (1942). Fidelity adaptation, that of Naturalism's relationship to the world, multiplies in a biological way, and multiplies biological forms. It becomes mechanical reproduction, the uncanny future Huysmans sees in store for aesthetics, a textual copy of nature's generations.

In a similar manner to the symbolism of the female in Huysmans, and the enduring misogyny of all of his works, biological reproduction is a locus of dread, a mode of empty bodies begetting others. The striking dreams of the protagonists of the three 'middle' novels; Des Esseintes, Jacques Marles, and Durtal, vividly symbolise this tendency.<sup>604</sup> All three utilise the female body as a symbol of a nightmarish fecundity,<sup>605</sup> of a reducing generation in Nature's empty cycles. Des Esseintes' dream is of a gendered and personified syphilis (1956: 90), a living decay venereally passed from body to body, adapting subjects with its organic elaborations. Jacques' dreams range from surrealist copulation in the Esther scene (1998:

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<sup>604</sup> As do the 'transubstantiations' of the female body into artifice in works like Villiers' *L'Eve Future* (1886).

<sup>605</sup> Lyytikäinen has discussed the conspicuously gendered Nature of revelatory visions in Decadent texts, beginning with *À rebours* (2016: 16). These ambiguous monstrous female figures function as metaphysical revelations for Lyytikäinen, beginning with Salome (the *ekphrasis* of whom has been traced for its extensive influence on later Decadent texts by de Palacio (2011), among others). Lyytikäinen says that Salome "initiates the audience into Decadent sexual phantasmagorias," into a "petrifying abjection that reveals higher truths" (2016: 18).

393-5) which recalls Salome, to the beautiful frozen sublimity of the moon's sterility (1998: 421-427), eventually corrupted by his wife's superficiality, and finally the grotesquerie of Truth personified as a giant ancient prostitute dominating the cityscape (1998: 475-6). Durtal's 'dream' of Gilles de Rais' hallucination (2001: 146-8), itself a chain of versions, finds a perverse and brutal Ovidian forest of guilt, where nature surrounds the character with violently pornographic metamorphoses out of the subject's control, an entropic natural world metastasising into chaos.

Both Des Esseintes and Durtal's dreams are set in forests, key *mises-en-scène* of natural cycles of embodiment/growth/decay, away from the control of texts. Jacques is embedded in the countryside throughout *En rade*, with the first dream of the novel commencing with the approach to a palace covered in a "blazing inferno of vine stock," a "vigorously fusing" confusion of "inconceivable vegetation" (1998: 392). Between the dream and its explanations, Jacques also has an intense experience amid a chaotic garden recalling Zola's *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (1875), and dank woods where he dwells on the dream and its sources (1998: 404). In Durtal's excessive and potent vision of Gilles de Rais fleeing into the satyric forest (2001: 146), the natural and its essence as a cyclicity of bodies invades the purity of the refuge which is the author's own adaptation, just as Des Esseintes' dream invades his aesthetic retreat. Both intrude via plants: the trees in this instance, and the floricultural adaptations in Des Esseintes' version, promulgating the return of the sick body which forces the character back to reality.

The failure of Durtal's writing to save him in any real sense is similarly foreshadowed in the vision of the obscene forest "where the organic literally ramifies" (Ziegler, 1989: 73). The hallucination at the heart of each book prefigures the unsatisfying end for characters and author alike. The materiality of the world breaks into the aesthetic disembodiment of the artificial fiction, and the characters are confronted by a vision of unchecked, mutable adaptation without meaning, the inversion of their creative project.

The link is emphasised by the fact that all three dreams are rooted in textual engagements - they are expanded variations on sources. Durtal's is stimulated by his own textual creation of the de Rais biography and its research intertexts. Jacques' final dream of the hideous crone of Truth follows from his reading of the magazine describing the "ptomaines" (1998: 467-9), themselves bodily versions of authored adaptation, distillations of bodies into gastronomic artworks ready for re-consumption.<sup>606</sup> Des Esseintes' vision, as previously adumbrated, is stimulated by the horticultural 'adaptations' of the flower-texts, nature seeping into the intertext which engenders the nightmare which is also gendered, featuring the woman conflated with the plant in a syphilitic parody of growth, ending in the carnivorous plant-as-vagina (1956: 92). These dreams, which particularly recall Huysmans' transpositions of Redon's work in *Cauchemar*, all combine themes of the fertility of the female body threatening the subject with natural entropy and fleshly re-embodiment - and all stem from a textual source. Thus, they might be read as unconscious, accidental adaptations by the subjects from memory-text combinations, and the irruption of Nature from its source texts into its adaptation.

These dreams symbolically encode the same dread as the adaptations come to signify in their own empty embodiments and repetitions in *À rebours*; once aesthetic time has been shown to be unable to incorporate the corporeality of the subject. The separate adaptive fragments carry this ontological dread in their metamorphosis from ornaments to worms in the figurative reading of the text as body beneath the shell of its most acknowledged adaptation, burrowing in from the intertextual surface to corrupt the integrity of the whole, until that whole collapses into the pure surface of the corpse. The house which symbolises

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<sup>606</sup> His dream of the moon is also based in recalling the details of selenographic maps (1998: 439), and Esther is born from vague memories of holy books, memorial intertexts with unstable lost sources (1998: 404).

Jacques<sup>607</sup> in *En rade* is a body of crumbling porosity, invaded by owls.<sup>608</sup> Un-curated memories break into the palace of Des Esseintes as sickness creeps into his body.

Like the house of the aesthete Roderick Usher (Poe, 1839), Decadent house-minds crumble as the texts progress, eventually ejecting their occupants back to Nature. In *Là-bas*, references to infinitely small and monstrous beings - larva, microbes, bacteria (2001: 177) - start to creep into the narrative, condensing the world with even more manifestations of bodies filled with other bodies, recalling the uncanny return of adaptive fragments in *À rebours*.<sup>609</sup> Huysmans went even further after *Là-bas* in his pre-conversion mysticism, believing<sup>610</sup> in swarms of infinitely small astral demons which could be utilised by Satanic practitioners.<sup>611</sup> Like De Quincey's opium dreams which progress from vast architecture to escalating antibodies (Wilson, 2016: 322) alongside greater dependence, a nightmarish quality is derived from the proliferation of living fragments, of bodies begetting others, of the metastasising forests rupturing house-selves and prefiguring the crowd bursting in on the *paradis artificiel*.

The forests and the women of the nightmares threaten the subjects with a pure biology, an entropic proliferation into disorder, breaking down without the transubstantiations of style. The organic cycle is a "horrifying torment" here, (Bernheimer, 1998: 372), where both women and vegetation take up a trope linking fertility and the Fall<sup>612</sup> common to the male authors of the *fin de siècle*. For Huysmans via his characters and texts

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<sup>607</sup> Whose final reverie dwells on decay, death and "the futile attempts to deny time" (Antosh, 1986: 40).

<sup>608</sup> A labyrinth full of door images which shift from conventional liberation symbolism to an *À rebours* signification of imprisonment, even as they let others in (Antosh, 1986: 70).

<sup>609</sup> These crop up in the 1889 *Certains* (2008) as well, prompted by Redon's images as source texts, and alongside descriptions of vulgar crowds in the Paris streets.

<sup>610</sup> Like his contemporary Strindberg in 1897's *Inferno* (1962), another convert. Des Esseintes too, by the end of the novel, sees himself fitting more easily into "a Catholicism which was seasoned with a touch of magic" rather than any conventional form of faith (1956: 200).

<sup>611</sup> indeed, the novelist frequently felt himself under attack from such entities (Baldick, 1955: 238-9).

<sup>612</sup> Explored most obviously by Zola in *La Faute de l'Abbé Mouret* (1875).



they symbolise and reflect the uncanny turn of the textual entropy and decay which the use of adaptations as an aesthetic artifice brought about; where texts that seemed to offer a transcendence instead merely led the subject back to the organic by mimetically doubling its structures.

Durtal's aforementioned dread of an afterlife of texts condemned to wander through history without meaning (Huysmans, 2001: 177) is perhaps a lesson Huysmans learns from *À rebours* and the experiments of Des Esseintes, where the adaptations of textuality only compound the problem of the self's embodiment in entropic biological time. A transcendent adaptation of the self-text to another plane is denied in these ideas, where a remaining in the non-meaning of Nature denies a deathly salvation, allowing only increasing putrefaction in a proliferating, non-generative decay, where death is purged by "anticipated resurrection."<sup>613</sup> Textual production becomes infected with the same disease, leaving the authors more and more putrefied through their texts, fed on by vermiculate readers and adapters who will follow the same paths, prefiguring living materialism and post-death consumption.

The adapting worms come for the adapter, who has failed to find a transcendence before his own decay draws them in. In *Là-bas*, Durtal's friend Des Hermies runs through a glib categorisation of the different worms that feed on the various social types (2001: 25). Ziegler notes that his comments "also apply to the ingestion of textual matter" (1989: 75), a refining through burrowing bodies. In this they reflect Des Esseintes' use of intertextual worms - synecdochical surface fragments signifying adaptations - whose refinements of texts wriggled in many a wall at Fontenay, improving sources by the consecutive versions bringing concentrations of flavour and density, creating that *osmazome*. But far from refining the subject via the bodies of texts, this cycle of corporeal entropy by proxy becomes a living decay.

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<sup>613</sup> A phrase used by Baudrillard to describe the production of simulacra and their unending proliferation, which corresponds effectively to the fear of perpetuating embodiment in unreal corporeal Nature in Huysmans' middle novels (1994: 2), before the simulacra is collapsed by faith, which returns the sacramental exchange value to reality.

The relevant avatar here is less Herod Antipas from the Salome painting, lusting after the ornamented body, and more the Tetrarch's nephew, Herod Agrippa. Flavius Josephus records Agrippa donning a dazzling garment made wholly of silver to appear in public, leading those present to attribute godly status to him, before he was struck down by a stomach illness which swiftly kills him (1737: 19.8.2). The Des Esseintes echoes are clear.<sup>614</sup> Luke, in Acts II (12:20) more specifically describes Agrippa being devoured from within by worms for accepting the praise of sycophants. The worms of adaptation are full of transcendent praise for the adapter and his project of artifice in *À rebours* - but they quickly move from Bloy's staircase to the author who descends it. Adapters and the adapted seem to deify the Decadent subject outside of Natural time in their vicarious speaking, but once the decay of textual bodies has initiated the return of corporeal decay, Des Esseintes, Durtal, and Huysmans must find the next kind of adaptation that will disembody, rather than embody further in living, decaying fragments.<sup>615</sup>

This then is the Decadent arc, read through its adaptations. It might be seen to be experienced not only by Des Esseintes, but also by Huysmans, who tried to artifice what he saw as Naturalism's stasis into Decadence, which itself became suffocating in its non-meaning, its pure surface. It required a recombination of the two, eventually, under the meaning system of Catholicism, where all becomes symbolic, where the fragments of Nature are coherently united in a manner which recalls Des Esseintes' quoting of Lacordaire: "that moment of grace 'when the last ray of light enters the soul and draws together to a common centre all the truths that lie scattered therein'" (Huysmans, 1956: 72-3). This is most effectively represented in *La cathédrale* of 1898 (2011), where Chartres becomes a petrified forest in the manner of Baudelaire's in 'Correspondances,' though without the latter's ambiguity.<sup>616</sup>

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<sup>614</sup> Praz is recalled, summing up a Decadent Byzantium through "a body full of bruises and decay enveloped in the symmetrical folds of a mantle of heavy gold" (1933: 397).

<sup>615</sup> For "it was clear that no haven of refuge or sheltering shore was left to him" (Huysmans, 1956: 202).

<sup>616</sup> Huysmans' comments on this are cited and unpacked in Baldick (1955: 319).

Through an interdisciplinary hermeneutics which allowed Huysmans to read and adapt the text of the cathedral as a microcosm, the world becomes a spiritual looking glass.<sup>617</sup> A new version of afterlife is found: one which holds, where time becomes nonlinear, spiritualised under a system of meaning in the repetitions of the sacred offices (Donato, 2004: 104). For Antosh, Huysmans' early novels search for something which might blockade reality, the middle novels, with their circular plots, experiment with methods, whilst the latter develop a conviction in religious seclusion's ability to achieve this. It is only in 1903, in *L'Oblat* (1924) that the architectural symbol morphs into an inn, a structure able to incorporate others, rather than formed to shut them out (1986: 50-52), and Ziegler indeed sees the development of the Dolorist aesthetic in Huysmans as a return of the audience (2010: 13).

In *À rebours* (and the other two 'middle novels' to varying degrees) the tragedy of existence is embodiment, the Fall into earthly bodies, a corrupting sacramentalism that brings an empty and repetitive suffering. The experiments show that - for the author - this cannot be denied but must be revealed.<sup>618</sup> The abjection of the textual body which reveals non-meaning anticipates the abjection of the body in Dolorism, but in *À rebours* we see only the realisation of the lack, not the later sublimation, for the novel functions as a confession.

The adaptations of *À rebours* are one way in which embodiment is explored, tested, and revealed; through text/body confections which encapsulate the Decadent ontology of Des Esseintes. Through Ziegler's asymptote, this might be read as Huysmans' examination and purging of tendencies on the route to more fulfilling systems of aesthetic metaphysics, with *À rebours* as "an exemplar of Decadent art as a purifying exercise" (2009: 237). As shown, the Decadent route offers the possibility of a kind of pessimistic aesthetic salvation, yet reveals itself as a failure - and, within the text of *À rebours*, innovative and creative uses of adaptation

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<sup>617</sup> This occurs in a more specifically corporeal sense in the 1901 *Sainte Lydwine de Schiedam* (1923).

<sup>618</sup> Ziegler describes this in the following terms: "as God condescended to a humiliating embodiment to reveal His own greater glory, the artist should portray the fate of the flesh and so make clear his spiritual ends" (Ziegler, 1989: 70).

work to negotiate this. The Decadent retreat is always temporary; whether for Des Esseintes,<sup>619</sup> Durtal, Jacques Marles, Gilles de Rais, Dorian Gray - or Baudelaire, Arthur Symons, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Paul Verlaine, Wilde, and Huysmans himself (Masurel-Murray, 2012). The gilded suffocation always leads the Decadent to the choice posed to both Baudelaire and Huysmans by Barbey d'Aurevilly: pistol or cross?

After *À rebours*, Huysmans had to discover his spiritual adaptation that adapts the soul as well as the body; the conversion that might redeem embodied textuality. This seemingly impossible version of adaptation, which includes both the body and the text, can, in Huysmans' world, only be achieved through faith, adapting aesthetics to spirituality. Huysmans, beginning in *Là-bas* with an *ekphrasis*, works through the successful experiment of spiritual naturalism, which was realised most fully in *St. Lydwine de Schiedam* (1903),<sup>620</sup> then tied up in his final work, the posthumous *Trois églises et Trois primitifs* (1908), finding an inherency of the mystical in reality (Antosh, 1986: 11). The aesthetic philosophy eventually becomes allied with the mystical substitution theology of Dolorism, where it becomes a parallel version in literature, an adaptation reflecting a more metaphysically efficacious version of the text/body conflation.

In Dolorist spiritual naturalism we might read a sublimated, sublimating adaptation on the plane of the self as text, not the texts as self. Huysmans finally found this in his conversion, his expiation of rotting bodies in various Catholic novels, but particularly in the hagiography of St. Lydwine, his extended historical adaptation illustrating the themes drawn from the Grünewald painting which features as *ekphrasis* in *Là-bas*. As a by-product of the discovery of the spiritual adaptation of self and entropic reality to eternity, he also finds a transcendence of transient embodiment, through the Dolorist doctrines of expiatory suffering. In this, the

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<sup>619</sup> Whose body forces him from his "solitary existence" and back to Paris, to normality (Huysmans, 1956: 196).

<sup>620</sup> See Baldick: "an account of Lydwine's appalling sufferings would give him an opportunity to achieve that 'mystical naturalism' or 'supernatural realism' which he had so admired in the Grünewald *Crucifixion* at Cassel" (1955: 399).

putrefactions of bodies<sup>621</sup> accelerate the refining spiritualisation of the self - and not just the individual, but humanity as a whole.

The poetics of decay embedded in this final adaptation enact a refining torture on an abject female body, making it a “thing without form,” an alchemical meditation on ruins which “sculpts the excremental clay of his saint’s body into virile gold.” With the pen as scalpel, and the text mirroring the body as a “baroque skeleton,” the demon of analogy becomes bodily via mystical substitutions which Huysmans was to complete with his own torment, which imitates Lydwine’s imitation (Sieburth, 1998: 1015-20). In the hollowing out of the saint via the ‘composting’ of historical source texts, the abject form is subject to a putrid suffering which refines both form and content into meaning.<sup>622</sup> The worms turn again and are themselves made holy in their turn; a generative decay of spiritual refinement in the body, as well as the text. Huysmans finds a way to textualise the body into a state of putrefaction that splits it from the soul, placing the soul into an eternal realm adapted out of embodiment, where the body’s decay becomes a badge of pride again, as it was in the pre-collapse aesthetic metaphysics of *À rebours*.

The entropic cycles of adaptation, which became the uncanny cycles of the body, are sublimated into the eternal cycles of religion. Temporal architectures shift. Bodies find salvation in suffering and surfaces find salvation in symbolism (both have wound-symbols bearing their meaning). Adaptations find their salvation in hagiography. This latter is a re-telling that spreads the message of universal salvation through wounded, decaying text-bodies which, in their symbolic sufferings, bestow grace upon unknowing readers; a

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<sup>621</sup> As Baldick notes, the work is “a recital of physical ills more harrowing than any medical dictionary,” where “for the milk-and-water of the average hagiography [Huysmans] substituted a compound of blood-and-pus; and into the tormented frame of his Lydwine he infused life and sanctity” (1955: 399-400).

<sup>622</sup> It achieves the spiritual Naturalist goal set out in *Là-bas* via the Primitives, whose “effect was somehow of matter transformed, whether by distention or compression, an incomprehensible flight into remote infinity” (2001: 7). This is instead of what occurs in the Decadent novel, where Lyytikäinen’s analysis of *Antinous* (1903) echoes *À rebours*, where the aesthetic life conducts the protagonist towards death, instead of offering the relief suggested by Schopenhauer (2016: 23).

stylisation of holy source texts which in dialogic returns sanctify the artifices of stylisation. The texts have surfaces encrusted with mystical wounds, but these are only signifiers of a system of meaning which subsumes the individual within an afterlife of a higher authorship, as in St. Lydwine, which forces the reader to suffer too through its textual skin “maculated with images of violence and horror” (Ziegler, 2004: 344). In Huysmans’ conversion to Catholicism, as read through his texts, a version of adaptation removed from pure intertextuality and intermediality into more ephemeral zones is found, one that transmutes the decay of the fallen body into a vehicle for transcendence. Through the imposition of a new framework of meaning, death becomes a recomposition after the expiatory decomposition of life - and the new medium requires no embodiment.

#### Chapter Summary:

This chapter has extended the dialogues between concepts of adaptation and key Huysmans/Decadent preoccupations of Nature and aesthetic time, considering in more depth the reasons for the inclusion of what are posited as versions, fragments, aspects, and echoes of adaptation in the Decadent aesthetics of *À rebours*’ form and content. In addition to an exploration of analogies between adaptation and entropy, which investigate through metaphor and association the generative decay of adaptation in a broader sense, the ideas of ornamentation and decay introduced in Chapter Two have been returned to in order to summarise the role that adaptation plays in the novel, and to posit intentional reasons for this form and role for Huysmans.

As the Decadent theme of decay was explored, *correspondences* were tracked between this idea and the curating adaptation that forms and is dramatised within the novel. Links between texts and bodies within a framework of degenerative entropy have been examined for the way that adaptation may signify structures of meaning that can redeem Decadent

materiality. However, like Des Esseintes' architext, *À rebours* as an adaptation of Nature also collapses. This is argued to happen because of the curatorial structure of the adaptation, which includes too much 'weight' in its ornamentation, suffocating the subject who perceives its lack of ontological meaning. In this sense, the body of the text decays, just as bodies in the text decay, returning the Decadent subject to their own body, and rupturing aesthetic time.

Despite adaptation's ability seemingly to offer participation for the textualised body in a universe of auratic adaptive entropy, where decay is generative, it instead becomes the mechanism which collapses the text and allows the uncanny/Gothic to enter, threatening the subject with an abjection signifying not only death, but the return of Nature in an inhumation within biological cycles of empty replication. The suffocation of the character within his house of adaptation (explored in the previous chapter) is reflected in the formal representation of his world in the novel, revealing the dissatisfaction of the author with the metaphysical aspect of Decadent aesthetics.

This is contextualised within Huysmans' *oeuvre*, where *À rebours* as an experiment in Decadent aesthetics is shown to be an important staging post in Huysmans' development, an ornamentation and decay which develops his style as it reveals Decadence's ontological failure. Adaptation is read as - in the unconventional forms identified here - a contributing part of the asymptotic experiment with aesthetic time.

## 7. Conclusions

### Summary

This thesis has placed select concepts from Adaptation and Decadent studies in dialogue with each other in order to explore the ways in which adaptation might be seen to be significant within a specific literary case study, seeking the novel as and as containing forms of adaptation *avant la lettre*. In investigating these, the thesis has scrutinised examples from border zones within Adaptation Studies, seeking liminal versions of adaptation which test assumptions in the field. In conceptualising these, it has added new ideas, terms, and figures to the Adaptation Studies repository. The thesis has also put into practice a revised version of the case study methodology in Adaptation Studies, and an implementation of the *petit theories* approach. The work here has shown that Adaptation Studies can be an effective addition to existing literary methodologies in the analysis of texts, providing fresh perspectives that engage with intertextuality and intermediality in this medium.

In summarizing the argument based around *À rebours*' Decadence, this thesis began with the contention that both Huysmans' novel and the house it represented were Decadent works of artificial style, and creative forms which shared traits with adaptations. In considering the central theme of artifice and its relationship to a concept designated Nature, varying ideas of textuality, intertextuality, and representation were utilised to propose that the Decadent text could be considered an adaptation in relation to a particular kind of source text.

This was posited as a collection of fragments of a textualised Nature, which had been decayed by interpreting reception into three types of fragment: textualised reality transposed to memory in reception, representations of reality without a clear adaptive dimension, and adaptations of representations of reality. These could be thought of as being collected into one



fragmentary mosaic-text by the Decadent adapter. This source text is suggested as the basis for forming the two adaptations connected by *mise-en-abyme* (one actual, one notional). Huysmans transposes the fragments through a stylising remediation to literature (an ornamentation), to become a fictional configuration which is represented *ekphrastically* over the course of the novel. In the allegory of the novel's content, Des Esseintes transposes the fragments through an embedding as object or memory (or both) in his architext (its own consumerist/tactile ornamentation).

The processes of adaptation can be described as curatorial, in the way that they select a collection of fragments, rearrange this collection to construct new analogical connections between the parts, add or remove elements, and re-stage this in a display containing other displays. The adaptation of Nature therefore incorporates a reflexively exposed intertextual layer of citations which also acknowledge layers of artifice. These intertexts and micro-adaptations influence the larger adaptation in various ways, at times being acknowledging citations of other threads of extended adaptation present simultaneously within the text of retreat or novel, such as the Baudelaire triptych. These forms of collection are suggested as influenced by multiple factors from Huysmans' biography, *oeuvre*, and milieu.

The adaptation of Nature into the Decadent text is a form of escape from the world into the authored artifices of aesthetic time. This is reached through the aura of objects, micro-adaptations, and adaptation as process, and the way that it stimulates memory and imagination through an aesthetic mysticism. Des Esseintes experiences this fully as creator and reader within his narrative world. Huysmans experiments with these ideas of Decadent aesthetic mysticism and its meaning for the subject by proxy.

Decadent ontological experience in relation to the adaptation of Nature can be read through Des Esseintes. This is because he lives in his museological artwork, where the *mise-en-scène* is the key collection housing the various other collections. It includes a memorial layer, the double of the text, which is argued for as the physical manifestation of an *ars*

*memoria* adaptation of Nature which stimulates an auratic reading across *tremplin* fragments. This launches the subject into aesthetic time, an existence in memory where the subject becomes text. In the palimpsestuous reading where we see the character experiencing this doubled text, we can see the emergence of the uncanny and the Gothic as the failure of the Decadent ontology and the suffocation of the subject.

In Des Esseintes' embodied experience of the Decadent text, Huysmans can be seen to be experimenting with the metaphysical significations of Decadent aesthetics. Using analogies between texts and bodies, the modes of adaptation examined are shown to be explorations within an aesthetic mysticism that might provide spiritual meaning for the subject. However, like Des Esseintes' architext, *À rebours* as an adaptation of Nature also collapses. This actually happens because of the curatorial structure of the adaptation, which includes too much 'weight' in its intertextual ornamentation and reflexivity, and suffocates the subject who perceives its lack of ontological meaning. In this sense, the body of the text decays, just as bodies in the text decay, returning the Decadent subject and reader to their own body, and rupturing aesthetic time.

This is in spite of adaptation's embedded hints towards a textualised embodiment in a universe of auratic adaptive entropy, where decay is generative. Instead, in the Decadent adaptation, adaptive entropy and decay become the mechanisms which collapse the text and allow the uncanny/Gothic to enter, reflecting the experience of Des Esseintes, and threatening the subject with an abjection signifying not only death, but the return of Nature in an inhumation within biological cycles of empty replication. The inversions invert to become the doxa, the curated fragments cause the putrefaction of the whole. Des Esseintes sickens and returns to Paris, Huysmans converts to literary spiritual naturalism and Dolorist Catholicism.

Beyond this core critical narrative, this thesis has attempted to show, through the application of its methodology, a number of concepts relevant to the study of adaptations. Firstly, that a pre-cinematic novel might be analysed productively as an adaptation or

container for adaptations, despite not conforming to many of the prevailing definitions for what constitutes a “legitimate” adaptation. The pre-cinematic subject for analysis has proved that Adaptation Studies might look to the past just as much as to the future. Modern audiences are adapters more than ever, immersing themselves in content which can be appropriated within a democratised digital world whose production is characterised by variation, repetition, porousness, collaboration, networks, and instability (Hutcheon, 2006: 206). However, these aspects are not exclusive to modern adapters and audiences, and the past may show an unexpected dynamism in these respects which may inform the analysis of present practice. In looking to the past in the manner of the analysis of *À rebours*, Adaptation Studies expands not only its historical reach beyond the now arbitrary introduction of film, but also its repository of ways to talk about adaptation. The unconventional adaptations within the conventional forms of past works diversify theorisations of practice in the same manner as the lateral spread into unconsidered adaptive forms in new media.

A focus on intentionality has also been a significant part of this thesis’ attempted contribution to the study of adaptations. A relocation of the ‘why?’ of adaptation in the creative process has proved productive in tying Decadent themes to adaptive forms, and demonstrated that intentionality still has a place in intertextual analyses, despite going against the grain of much of the theorising in this discourse. Similarly, figuration has been shown to be an evocative method for conceptualising adaptations, building on a significant thread within intertextual, intermedial, and adaptive study.

*À rebours* has been shown to contain many unusual adaptations which allow a scrutiny of border zones in Adaptation Studies, and which challenge stable notions of adaptation’s processes and products. These provide interesting perspectives on what constitutes the theory and practice of adaptation. It has also been argued that adaptation can be a mode of artifice, suggesting that adaptation *avant la lettre* has a place in Decadent poetics. Similarly, by demonstrating that a version of adaptation is actually allegorised and dramatised within

the narrative world of *À rebours*, Des Esseintes is shown to be concerned with Decadent versions of what we might term adaptation. By extension, Huysmans is concerned with, and utilises, modes of adaptation frequently within the novel. Adaptation becomes a textual component of the thematic explorations of *À rebours*, a *mise-en-abyme* of content in form.

This thesis has attempted to demonstrate that a panoply of ideas linked to adaptation are present in *À rebours*. The use of the text as an arena staging conceptual dialogues between Adaptation Studies and Decadent studies reveals it as an unconventional adaptation in its own right, and a repository of other versions of adaptation, both within the form of the novel, and allegorised and dramatised in the heterocosm of its narrative. The modes of adaptation employed by Huysmans have been interpreted as particularly Decadent in style, engaging with primary Decadent themes. Des Esseintes' adaptations have also been analysed for their thematic engagement, specifically with the archetypal Decadent pursuit of atemporality through a curatorial adaptation of Nature.

### Further Study

The limitations of time and the word count meant that this thesis' dual or 'looking-glass' approach had to choose and pursue one side of the dialogue far more extensively. This was the reading of adaptation in the Decadence of *À rebours*, which meant that reflecting back on adaptation was reserved to the evoking of questions and the testing of boundaries, rather than a concerted pursuit of the ways in which Decadent concepts change our thinking around adaptation. Out of necessity, this had to remain a largely implicit line of argument, making it a fruitful next step after the adaptation-in-Decadence groundwork has been laid.

In terms of other routes for progressing from the ideas expounded in this thesis into areas of further study, the two main subjects taken up - Huysmans' Decadent aesthetics in *À rebours*, and Adaptation Studies - represent two major pathways. In the former, there is a

clear direction from the work taken up in this thesis to similar examinations of the role of adaptation in other works by Huysmans, which the analysis of *À rebours* has frequently hinted at and touched on, but which is not attempted in extended form here. Consolidations of the conclusions drawn in the final chapters, regarding Huysmans' Decadent period and its place in his oeuvre in relation to his conversion, could be effected by an examination of *Là-bas* and *En rade* in greater detail. Similarly, the earlier and later periods in Huysmans' oeuvre, frequently called the Naturalist and Catholic periods respectively, merit further analysis for how adaptation is utilised. These may occasion a revision or a more cohesive conception of the suggested uses of techniques of adaptation in *À rebours*, in relation to the 'self-adaptations' of the Naturalist by the Decadent, and the Decadent by the Catholic.

With regards to the Decadent aesthetics of *À rebours*, further work might be done to note either a consistency or polyvalence in terms of adaptation's place, whilst at the same time attempting to confirm or disprove some of the claims about Huysmans' intentional or incidental idiosyncrasies of practice. This could be done by attempting a broader and more historically or teleologically motivated examination of Decadent writers (or those associated with the appellation in other disciplines), analysing how adaptation functions in relation to key Decadent themes within a more comparative framework. Similarly the Baudelairean thread might be productive if taken further and in a more direct manner, in terms of either its influence on *À rebours* within a conventional intertextual or adaptive framework, or the influence of Baudelairean ideals on the adaptations of a more general Decadent poetics derived from a broader survey.

An aspect initially planned as a major part of this study was the Symbolist aesthetic which is contemporaneous with Decadence, frequently overlapping and blurring with its *fin de siècle* relation. It swiftly became clear that attempting to address both areas, in addition to textual examples and their authorial contexts, would limit the depth of analysis in relation to both. However, this is a principal area of proposed further study which may be undertaken as

an extension of the work in this thesis, utilising the research which was not included in the final version. As a counterpoint to Decadent aesthetic philosophies, Symbolism would represent on a more general scale what the Catholic period in Huysmans' oeuvre does; namely an escape from stifling Decadence into a system of meaning which redeems surfaces.

This was the literary and biographical trajectory of many adherents of Decadent literature, such as Arthur Symons, where Symbolism offers an adaptation of Decadent style which (in the manner of Elliot's ventriloquist concept) empties out the nihilistic signifieds of Decadence whilst keeping its ornate signifiers, replacing the former with the esoteric significances of a Symbolist metaphysics. Georges Rodenbach's *Bruges-la-Morte* (1892) represents an excellent comparison piece to *À rebours*, a novella which again can be read as allegorising notions of adaptation within its narrative. An analysis of this within a similar methodological framework to that utilised here, replacing Decadence with Symbolism, might produce not only a useful companion piece, but a comparison which clarifies or deepens some of the ideas of this thesis.

Further investigations into the notions of Adaptation Studies applied to *À rebours* might take up a number of different directions. Firstly, the initial move into the past in terms of the adaptations studied might be easily followed, utilising the fairly new-found freedom of Adaptation Studies to identify pre-cinematic texts which might benefit the theorising of adaptations, or benefit from analysis via an adaptive methodology. As the move into the past is easily replicated in further studies which will contribute to this extension of the adaptive repository, so the further utilisation of flexible methodologies such as those employed here will contribute to testing adaptation's boundaries and applicability.

Other threads which might be taken up as extensions of the key concerns outlined in the methodological approaches might pursue adaptation as allegorised in adaptations or non-traditionally adaptive texts. This has proved particularly fruitful in the investigations into *À rebours*, representing many of the key starting points for threads of inquiry, and leading

towards the figurations which tie adaptation in the novel to its themes, and to notions of generalised metaphors for thinking through adaptations. These are also a key route into intentionality, where allegorisation or the reading of themes in adaptations might suggest certain principles of an adaptive poetics; in further studies this route is easily replicable, and productive in its immediate diversification from conventional conceptual models.

Adaptation (as a type of intertextuality) as a formal contributor to the meaning of a novel is another route which might be usefully examined further, where this aspect is conventionally dealt with in intertextual studies in a reception sense, but which only infrequently makes its presence felt in Adaptation Studies. In its adaptive guise, it can help to theorise both adaptive authorship and intertextual intentionality, while working to expand the ways in which adaptation can be analysed for its contributions to textual architectures and their attendant meanings. As in the explorations of adaptation as a mode of artifice and decay in *À rebours*, these functions might be examined for their presence or permutations in further examples.

Figuration and intentionality more generally might be pursued effectively as key methods for adaptive methodologies. Figuration in particular could benefit from both the expansion and diversification mentioned by so many theorists as being essential to the development of adaptation theory, but also from a more historical survey of its presence within Adaptation Studies. Establishing a repository of adaptive figuration's key modes and contributions could be a useful dictionary of models, and productive for hinting at directions in which it may subsequently progress.

The use of a single case study in Adaptation Studies might also be taken up again as a useful method for mining a work for images and metaphors which can function as figures through which adaptation might be conceptualised. Intentionality needs further application as a key aim for studies of adaptation in order to confirm its relevance and work towards a sense of reinstatement more generally in textual scholarship, so more modern examples of the

analysis of adaptive authorship through the kinds of posited significance examined here would certainly be welcome for their contribution and testing of this.

Finally, the version of seeking unconventional adaptations attempted here - through a pluralism of definition, through content as well as form, through allegorical reading - might be repeated alongside the important work being done in new media. As the more experimental end of a scale which includes work such as Leitch's master texts and Hutcheon's heterocosms, the conceptions of adaptation such as adapting Nature, adapting to/from memory, and notional chains of adaptation such as the *ekphrasis* of the house, represent an important exploration of liminal zones and porous boundaries.



## Appendix: Nature and The Real

The concept of Nature is here an essential one to qualify and elucidate. The capitalised term Nature is chosen for its specific relationship to Decadence and *À rebours*, which will be returned to. However, its origins for application to the research lies in the Baudelairean discussions of reality and realism, and are echoed again in Wilde's work, where the idea of nature as the opposite to art (also found in Gautier) is utilised to unfold a philosophy of artistic primacy and natural unoriginality (a classic Decadent paradox), where nature's base 'truths' mimic art's beautiful lies.

This nods towards some of the theoretical paradigms which might suggest themselves as necessary frameworks for analysing a concept which bears such clear resemblance or terminological proximity to 'reality' and 'the real.' The first of these would be a Lacanian perspective, which here is not chosen directly for the analyses of *À rebours*. For Lacan, the Real is all that is outside of the language of the symbolic. It cannot be represented, being undifferentiated and inaccessible except in the pre-Oedipal formulations before subject formation in the mirror stage. After this, the subject is able to experience the Real only through traumatic gaps in the symbolic order, such as natural disasters which rupture the meaning structures of the symbolic order (Fink, 1996).

The Lacanian Real would have been interesting to consider in terms of the ruptures within the Decadent ontology examined in depth in Chapter Five, but its embedding in a psychoanalytic framework would have meant an importing of a subsuming theoretical perspective for a study averse to such methodological monoliths. The Lacanian Real, whose rejection of incorporation into the symbolic order makes it untameable by adapters, is therefore not a useful perspective for the intentions of this thesis when it comes to exploring the 'adapting history' framework from Adaptation Studies.

However, the focus on the subject in Lacan is a useful opposition to the eliding of this figure in the post-structuralist work which is so influential in Adaptation Studies, and this thesis certainly requires a 'living' notion of a subject. Whilst Lacanian ideas of perception as a reception which mediates what was previously the Real, where it becomes the Symbolic, are useful for their ties to Baudelaire's subjective realism, there are other theoretical views of this conceptual matrix which seem to suggest more obvious connections to Decadent aesthetic and ontological positions.

An approach related to the Lacanian, not least through some Freudian foundations, is that of Baudrillard. For Baudrillard, the real is the collage of simulacra, a desire-producing fabric of copies of copies (with no originals). In *Simulations* (1983), he extends the semiological perspective from *The System of Objects* (1994), which sees the subject (a dubious entity in postmodernism) as object and the object as sign – everything as a sign – under the spectacular simulacra of Capitalism. For Baudrillard there is no objective real – the map precedes the territory. This idea is very reminiscent of the Aestheticist and Baudelairean concepts of the 'objective' real and the fallacy of realism, which is taken up by Decadence. In this, nature copies art (as in *À rebours*' flowers), and we can trace a dialogism in the way that Decadent artists theorise reality as a mass of texts which have copied more refined texts – or at least which cannot be read without this palimpsestuous overlay.

The Baudrillardian real as a mass of signs with no origin, of what might be considered artificial textual fragments, is a useful perspective for Decadence not only in the way that Decadence has been argued for as proto-postmodernist, but also because these ideas correspond to Decadent views of nature's textuality, and push the investigation towards the extension of the 'adapting history' Adaptation Studies thread which is examined here. Under a Baudrillardian view of Decadent aesthetics, derived from Aestheticism and Baudelaire, where the real is a mass of simulacra, representation in any Romantic sense is impossible. If the real is artificial and textualised by dialogic reception, or in its Baudrillardian Capitalist sense,

where it is intertextually constructed as other authored texts are, in the making and the reception, then representation is a myth, as it assumes an impossible equivalency between the sign and the thing (the real) for Baudrillard.

It has been argued that Decadence wished to highlight the fallacy of Romantic representation (e.g. Riffaterre, 1999: 78), and adaptation as an extended and acknowledged intertextual engagement – particularly one that employs other forms of intertextuality self-consciously in dialogue with its adaptive status – becomes the only form of representation which acknowledges the conditions of its artistic production and spectatorial reception. Similarly, the ‘real’ as an artificially manipulated source text might be adapted just as legitimately as any other form of source text, where adapting the real, like adapting history, highlights the fallacies of representation and Enlightenment/Romantic objectivity/originality. Adapting the real highlights simulacra.

However, the Baudrillardian conceptualisation of the real is not the only way in which Nature is considered through its adaptation into/in *À rebours*. The semiological and simulacral perspectives of the real, which have their correspondent attitudes in the work of Baudelaire which underpins the Decadent aesthetic philosophy applied in the novel and its depiction of a Decadent work, are one half of the concept of the real which moves from Baudelaire to Huysmans.

The other participates in a tradition that complements, yet holds back from, the Baudrillardian framing of the real. This is an idea of the real in opposition to the purely sensory engagement with the world. This has a long mystical and theological history in East and West, in Ancient Greece and Augustinian Christianity. It comes to Decadence through Baudelaire’s adoption of the *correspondences* from the Hermetic tradition, where reality is actually the sublime macrocosm beyond the limited microcosm of the sensory world (Underhill, 1911: 40). This is in stark contrast to the postmodern real, but in a writer such as

Huysmans the two become a doubled world corresponding to the idea of spiritual naturalism, the earthy and the mystical.

There is the real of Nature, and the Real of the spirit. The Real in this formulation, in opposition to the real, is the mystical atemporality suggested by the *correspondences*, where forms blur in an ephemerality of disembodiment, of Platonic Ideas. The real is the simulacra which do not go as far as Baudrillard's conception, as they maintain an equivalence to the Real, but which are still a collage of copies engaging sensorially with the subject. The mystical Real is what the Decadent is attempting to reach via the authored artifice of aesthetics, in their adaptation of the real as Nature. Their attempt to simultaneously expose the simulacra of the real, and bypass it, through their adaptation, can be described as follows:

"If the mind penetrates deeply into the facts of aesthetics, it will find more and more, that these facts are based upon an ideal identity between the mind itself and things. At a certain point the harmony becomes so complete, and the finality so close that it gives us actual emotion. The Beautiful then becomes the sublime; brief apparition, by which the soul is caught up into the true mystic state, and touches the Absolute, the Real. It is scarcely possible to persist in this Esthetic perception without feeling lifted up by it above things and above ourselves, in an ontological vision which closely resembles the Absolute of the Mystics" (Récéjac, 1897: 74).

In the Decadent aesthetics of *À rebours*, Huysmans employs a Baudelairean version of the real which is doubled, combining the mysticism of the *correspondences* with a proto-postmodernism similar to Baudrillard's ideas. Here, the world of the senses, the real of Nature, is a mass of simulacra, 'texts' read by the senses, where the dialectics of representation are impossible, meaning that Decadent creation is inevitably adaptation, but also purposefully adaptation in order to reflexively undermine the fallacies of the Romantic

veneration of originality, and the realist/Naturalist fetishisation of representation, and to reveal the emptiness of the signs of the world. However, through the Baudelairean thread of the *correspondences*, and Huysmans' general propensities for spirituality, the mystical vision of a sublime Real beyond the simulacral Natural real is retained as a possibility desired in aesthetic time, but ultimately only found through Catholic faith.

In the service of clarity, and recognising the cultural and theoretical baggage of such a term, 'the real' is generally avoided in this thesis' discussions of these concepts. Instead, the term Nature replaces the Baudrillardian/material version of the real, whilst the spiritual version is generally referred to as aesthetic time (a term unpacked in Chapter Four). These choices are connected to the specificities of Decadent aesthetics, Baudelairean ideas, Huysmans and the *fin de siècle*, and *À rebours*' narrative world and thematic architecture.

Nature is a nexus incorporating nature itself - the organic, the vegetal, the animal, the embodied, reproductivity and disease, the abject and the deathly – within the framework of anti-nature derived from Baudelaire, which is the fount of Decadent artifice. It is similar to the way that Leakey sees 'nature' as a term which "embraces the whole of reality" (1969: 169). Tied to this are notions of time that are important for being the negative double of aesthetic time, just as texts are argued for in Chapter Five as the positive body double of negative corporeality. Time includes past repressions and future horrors, but also very much in this context indicates the present. It indicates modernity, mass culture, consumption, and the bourgeois. It is non-auratic, non-aesthetic temporality. These ideas are all unpacked successively across the argument of the thesis.

Nature becomes a term for the real that indicates the natural outside of authorship, but also the historical and cultural present, and the individual's connection to that through the nature of their own biology. Nature is the opposition for the Decadent. It is everything art is not. It is everything outside the retreat waiting to get in. It is the repressed, the embodied. It is the abject, it is death. Nature is the real which must be adapted for the Decadent creator.

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